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Fifty years on		
Letters on	Subsidizing Literature, 'Earth to Earth', 'Difficult Women'	
Among this week's contributors		

POLITICS

MICHAEL STRAIGHT

After Long Silence
351pp. Collins. £11.95.
0002170019

NIGEL WEST

A Matter of Trust: M15 1945-72
166pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£8.35
0297782533

Oddly enough the fiercest spy-hunters - Rebecca West, Andrew Boyle and, most relentless and well-informed of them all, Chapman Pincher - scarcely concern themselves with the psychology of their traitors and spies. When Boyle exposed Anthony Blunt, he called his book *The Climate of Treason*, but the climate - the intellectual climate - was the one thing he was unable to describe. They may, of course, distrust ideas as such. The fashion of treating human behaviour as conditioned by events in infancy or by impersonal forces in history has been conveniently used to exempt individuals from moral responsibility. Perhaps the spy-hunters feared that to examine the ideas of the 1930s might appear to mitigate the villainy of the spies. For villains they were. Philby sent dozens of Soviet defectors and men and women in East Europe, who had been British agents informing against the Nazis to their deaths. Blunt, who worked in such a sensitive and important part of M15 that his colleagues accepted that he was not obliged to share his secrets with them, was not far behind Philby in his villainy. And they had escaped retribution. The spy-hunters wrote from a justifiable sense of outrage.

Before the war men who spied against their own country were in popular imagination either reckless officers like Esterhazy driven into it by blackmail or ruinous gambling or a rapacious mistress; or they were in fiction faceless anarchists such as Mr Verloc or vain, venal agents such as Charles Latimer MP. Now there emerged a new kind of spy. Graham Greene has compared him to the Jesuits in Elizabethan England, a spy dedicated to the service of another country which he believed to be the salvation of the world. The analogy is far-fetched. Men and women who had been converted to the most hypnotic

The clutches of comradeship

Noël Annan

secular religion of the day were induced to become its undercover agents. How? Michael Straight, who was recruited as an undergraduate by Anthony Blunt at Cambridge to spy for what is now the KGB, attempts to answer.

It is not an altogether convincing answer. It is too autobiographical to be a study of the times and yet not autobiographical enough. Mr Straight does not face the issues which he raises about himself. His book is enormously readable in the way that a Sunday serial is readable and, as a narrative, is riveting. It is written in short paragraphs which package ideas and people. He rarely explores them. To him there is a simple explanation of his vulnerability to the spy-masters. He had no roots; he was a second-generation progressive; and he was ashamed of his money. Born a Whitney, he should have had roots, but his mother had remarried some years after his father's death and Michael had been whisked away to England - and to a somewhat quirky enclave. For his mother's new husband was Leonard Elmhirst, and together, with her fortune they started Dartington Hall. Dartington was certainly a community, but it was not conspicuous among public schools for hallowing England's traditions. It dedicated itself to pulling up roots rather than putting them down.

The children of indomitable progressives are often puzzled in adolescence how to assert their individuality. Michael Straight inherited his mother's qualities - with a twist. Disagreement or contradiction was foreign to her nature. She gave a resigned smile and sailed on like a liner swamping the vulgar tramp steamer that had dared to hoot at her. He, on the other hand, feared to meet a challenge or assert himself - he hated hurting or offending anyone. His mother was dedicated to changing human nature, she was dedicated to changing the world. She created love, he craved love. His dashing elder brother loomed over him and, uninhibited, enjoyed his wealth. Michael Straight agonized about his. Someone told his cousin, the future ambassador to the Court of St James, that Michael felt guilt because he was wealthy. "Wealthy?" exclaimed Jock Whitney with a fine sense of the distinction between the rich and the very rich, "What makes him think he's

wealthy?" Still, among his fellow students at LSE he undeniably was. There in 1933 he studied under Harold Laski for a year waiting to pass the entrance exam to Cambridge and gravitated straight to the Socialist Society which, as in many universities, had been taken over by the Communists. He went on his first demo and felt ashamed not to know the words of the Internationale. Then he was passed on by the comrades to John Cornford and James Klugman at Cambridge. It was a textbook induction.

He made an instant impact upon his contemporaries. One of them, Frank Singleton, described it. Straight was "handsome, gifted, versatile, precocious, virile. What on earth was he not? He played squash with one of the Sitwells (or was it the Sassoons), and he loved the masses." His quick wits and ability won him a first in economics and his naive sincerity quelled any suspicion that he was on the make when he decided to climb the worldly ladder of the Cambridge Union. What was he after? What, when one is young, thoughtful and troubled, is one always after? To define reality; to escape from the loneliness and the uncertainty of oneself. But what was reality? Was it the despair of the college servant his brother handed on to him who, when Michael dismissed him, said "But if gentlemen like you don't employ us, what is to become of us?" Or was it the strike in Norwich which Cornford told him was not, as Straight thought, a symbol of the class struggle, but the class struggle itself? He came to accept reality as Party doctrine hammered out in innumerable discussions late into the night as Cornford and Klugman educated their acolytes. Was it not proved that the Soviet Union alone would resist fascism and that the capitalist economies were doomed to collapse or become fascist? Gravely they concluded that it was so.

But young Communists not only use the word comrade but give it meaning. For the first time Straight had the sense of belonging to a group, a team, with its own language, pass-words, jokes and loyalties. Intellectuals despise comradeship when they see the shape it takes among their hearty contemporaries singing rigger songs or burning a boat. Yet they long for it every bit as much. The innumerable societies at universities which spring up and wither after one or two student generations are the offspring of this craving. Communism supplied it for that generation of intellectuals. Now they could escape the charge of being irresponsible gadflies or remote intellectuals who fiddled while Rome burnt. I remember a contemporary of mine, cynical, rocklessly clever and deflating, a fantastical who at Cambridge was driven by his desire to belong to something more than himself. He was physically inept but tried and failed to cox a boat and win a boxing Blue. In the end he joined the Party. No one who knew his former sense of humour and his keen nose for cant would have credited it.

Nothing in the 1930s - conversion to Roman Catholicism, Buchmanism, pacifism, or homosexual practices and parties - gave postulants such a sense of being initiated into the arcane and outraging the elderly as adopting the speech, manners and ideology of the Communists. It was more anti-patriotic than pacifism, more subversive of *bien-pensant* morality than homosexuality, and apparently more directly concerned with the wickedness of the world and its salvation than religion. When Straight went through his letters of those days, he was certain that it was this, rather than the intellectual appeal of Communism, that kept him captive. "I'm filled with a violent uncontrollable love for them; an extraordinary sense of comradeship," he wrote to his mother in November 1935. "It's unreasonable and inexplicable. It burns within me and I can't express it; I can't get it out." That was written after the night when Klugman invited him to meet Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt - after which Blunt took a special interest in him.

Comradeship - the intense daily activity of his circle in Trinity out of which he seldom moved - so cocooned Straight that he never considered some other version of reality. Even today he seems to forget that the vast majority of Cambridge undergraduates were uninterested in politics and regarded the martyrs selling the *Daily Worker* outside the Mill Lane lecture-rooms with derision. "All Trinity," he writes, "was in an uproar in May 1936" because he had sent a petition to the Fellows demanding that the college servants' wages should be raised. In fact most Trinity undergraduates had never heard of it. They had never heard of it because Straight was far too

friendly towards dons and too gentlemanlike to consider using the tactics of confrontation and verbal violence current among the militant students of the 1970s.

Some worldly Oxonians have seen the Apostles as a significant symbol of this cult of claustrophobic friendship, and depict that society as the sinister breeding-ground of subversion. Certainly the Apostles featured as a society which the Communists determined to capture as they had captured the Socialist Society. But, contrary to Chapman Pincher's assertion that the Apostles' "major topic of conversation was communism and its merits", they rarely discussed politics. The members regarded the Society as a place of welcome relief from Marxist analysis. Discussion was conducted in another language. Indeed it was among the elderly Apostles that Straight met the only real intellectual challenge he exposed himself to in Cambridge. This was Keynes; and he did not hesitate to accept Keynes's destruction of Marx's labour theory of value. What he could not accept was that capitalism might yet be saved. Just as it is possible to be in love with two women simultaneously, so it is possible to accept two contradictory versions of the way the world works; and Straight remembers an evening in which he and Piero Sraffa, having just heard Keynes tear Marxist economics apart, walked back to Trinity in silence. He makes it clear that there were three types of Communists then at Cambridge: dedicated open Party members, such as Cornford, who took their orders from King Street; moles who were friendly, appeared to be uncommitted but who were recruited as spies; and, by far the largest number, fellow-travellers such as himself.

What had the fellow-travellers in common? Most of them believed that no European capitalist country would stand up to Hitler and some thought that in the last resort the democracies would become his allies against Russia. That was partly why Labour in opposition opposed re-armament, with certain honourable exceptions such as Dalton. Then there was the belief that capitalism was on the verge of collapse. (On the second page of his book Straight still seems to accept this might have been so, when he writes that in 1937 the British economy was foundering: it was in fact on the upturn.) Then, as now, the Communists made great play with the

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slogans of Peace ("Scholarships not Battleships" was the slogan on Straight's virgin demo); then, as now, a high-minded pacifist movement responded. Finally there was the belief that the Soviet Union was the only state which remotely suggested a new society and that its backwardness and even its mistakes – no fellow-traveller ever called them crimes – could be explained away. Were those mistakes not venial, it was argued, compared with the rapacity of entrepreneurs and the callous way they threw human beings on the scrap-heap of unemployment?

It was not the ethos of the Apostles and E. M. Forster which abetted this softness towards the Soviet Union. It was more the hard-headed toughness on which some technocrats or scientists such as "Sage" Bernal or C. P. Snow (a fellow-traveller in one sense to the end of his life) prided themselves. They believed that only a communist society would use scientific methods to improve the standard of living, and that the "future" lay with Soviet Russia. This produced a reverence for anything Russian which at times was comical. Straight records a trip to Moscow made by himself and half a dozen of the leading lights of the Left. The story which circulated round Cambridge on their return was that he was seen stroking a chimney-piece in the Kremlin and heard to murmur "Soviet timber, Soviet marble!" "Bow down and worship wood and stone?" exclaimed Charles Fletcher-Cooke, "Certainly not!"

The contemporary who inspired Straight at Cambridge was John Cornford, and he gives a fine account of that fierce, pure, immensely able, narrow, intense figure. He calls him a romantic but Cornford was someone who had to live up to his ideals and therefore fought in Spain – and the word romantic masks the mastery of the organizer. There is little attempt to portray Guy Burgess, who surfaces memorably every so often, like a shark's teeth below, to hypnotize and menace. But astonishingly able as a plotter, and adept at thwarting any person who threatened the achievement of his aims as was this wayward, unstable, clever, drunken, scandalously homosexual figure of countless escapades, Straight is wrong in implying that he was a Svengali, the "invisible man" behind Blunt. He may be right in believing that Burgess seized on the opportunity created by Cornford's death on the Córdoba front to exploit Straight's grief and recruit him as a spy. No doubt Burgess used Blunt as a talent-spotter, but the Russian espionage network, to protect itself, operated from London, and the major spy-master sat there, not in Cambridge. Blunt told Straight – most gently, most kindly, but implacably – that he must first pretend to suffer a breakdown and renounce, as it were in disgust, his Party ties; and then return to America and use his family connections to get into Wall Street or government service and operate as a spy.

Straight reminds one of Merton Densher in *The Wings of the Dove*. He was weak, middle-headed and indecisive, yet he would not commit the final act of infamy. He could not lead two lives and save his friends. When his Russian contact contacted him, he left the State Department and handed him only his own assessments of American policy, including a plea to Stalin not to make the Nazi-Soviet pact stronger than a partnership of necessity. He became a speech-writer for Roosevelt, campaigned against the American Left who opposed intervention in the war and became a pilot in the US Air Force.

After the war he was still very much a man of the Left, a sort of Nenni socialist. With unerring bad judgment he backed Henry Wallace, and made him editor of the *New Republic*, which Straight owned. Straight fought the Communists who were making Wallace their front man in his campaign against Truman, but he does not choose to examine why he was then so obsessively hostile to the foreign policy of his own country. (His account of Wallace, who used to fall asleep at every meeting, is unforgettably still on the peace tag he could not come to terms with his past. On the one hand he did not doubt it was his duty as a citizen to testify in the days of McCarthy that some of those under suspicion were in fact Communists and that others were not. That was courageous; and Straight took a decision many liberals were not

honest enough to take. On the other hand, when challenged about his past in the 1940s by that astute economic analyst, Eliot Janeway, he ducked the issue and withdrew from a contest for a Congressional seat. On a visit to London he met Burgess, who quizzed him on his change of heart. What Burgess and Blunt wanted to know was whether he had denounced or would denounce them; and Burgess still exerted such mesmerizing power that Straight decided – if that is the word – that he could not do so.

Why in the end did he? Straight gives various answers, none of them totally convincing. Possibly he may have thought it unfair to inform on those to whom he had been bound by such intimate terms of friendship when he was young. In our youth are so many of our follies – and so many of our loyalties. To renounce one's past is always distasteful – and particularly painful for those who put their trust in such abstractions as peace and social justice. One suspects that ambition had something to do with it. By the time of the Kennedy era he was disenchanted with the politics of protest, a family row had forced him to sell the *New Republic* and he had become a novelist. "Good causes", he writes revealingly, "were hard to find." But when he began to be offered posts in government agencies set up to endow the arts, he knew that to accept would mean security clearance by the FBI and the only course was to denounce himself. He wanted such posts. Men in their fifties often do – they want to be recognized by the world, they want to run something. So he took the plunge. Motives must be distinguished from the rightness of moral decisions. Whatever propelled him, his action was right and honourable.

The British, however, might have had to wait for years to learn what he had to tell. It was only by chance that William Sullivan of the FBI, wanting to get his own back on J. Edgar Hoover, tipped off an MIS officer, who happened to be visiting Washington, to talk to Straight. The FBI had in fact identified Blunt as one of the ring men Burgess and Maclean defected. Straight volunteered to go to London for further debriefing and consoled himself that if he incriminated some he could clear others among his former Communist contemporaries. He does not show how – presumably by his assessment of their characters not their abilities. One of them, now dead, was most adept as a student in the role given him by the Party of enrolling Asian and African students (among them that fine Indian politician, S. M. Karamaniam). After the war he displayed the same ability and distinction as a don but no one could have been more genuinely hostile to Communism. But one wonders whether Mr Straight ever read his work – for if he did not, how could he judge?

"With that my role as an informer came to an end", concludes Straight. "It is a role that is despised in every country." It runs counter to a determination we all share – not to inflict pain upon others. In 1981 he was identified as having informed upon Leo Long as well as Blunt, and the press descended on him, unjustly pillorying him too as a spy. He declares he was "more than willing to bear some part of the punishment". There speaks the authentic voice of liberalism – individuals as well as its weakness in distortedly recognizing the duties men owe to the State. When anyone writes an apology it is natural to ask oneself how far it is true. Sometimes a detail strikes one as dubious. On that trip to London after the war can it really be true that he met Burgess by chance walking down Whitehall? Might there not have been a phone-call prompted by... what? Curiosity? What in those heady *New Republic* days was the state of his mind? But by and large the account rings true to me. A less honest man would have suppressed, or distorted some of the stories. Straight is a gull in politics, but perhaps in the end the fact that he was born a Wasp and a Whittier – though not an infallible prophylactic – preserved his sense of honour.

Nigel West's history of MIS is a different matter. It is highly professional and reveals MIS's "code of battle", i.e. who at different dates headed which division or branch. Since it doesn't claim to be an official history, it seems highly likely that Mr West too has found sources who have served within the intelligence service so that

he is almost as well informed as Chapman Pincher. His book should confound, if anything can, the airy sceptics such as A. J. P. Taylor, who declare that spies never discover anything that an experienced journalist could not ferret out: so why get worked up about security or finance ludicrous operations? It is clear that Russia and the secret services of her satellite countries under the direction of the KGB continue to mount a massive operation against our own tiny security forces and latch on to the individuals in this, as in all Western countries, who work in sensitive official departments.

West's story begins with the arrest or exposure of the traitors who worked for the Nazis, but quickly shifts to the discovery of the atom-bomb spies, Nunn May and Fuchs. West soon shows how complicated an affair spying and the control of spies is. It resembles the parodies of baroque operas which Lytton Strachey used to write, in which the young men

appointment did not achieve what those who welcomed it expected. In 1952 White was convinced of Philby's guilt and built up such a case that the head of MIS, Menzies, much against his will was forced to demand Philby's resignation. Philby, of course, denied everything, and it would have been impossible to convict him in court. But some of Philby's colleagues in MIS were outraged even though they had seen none of the evidence. They believed he had been martyred, just as Blunt's friends believed him to be traduced by Gornwy Rees's newspaper articles. Philby did not, as West says, "become" a journalist. It was fixed with the *Observer* and *The Economist*, and MIS continued to pay him for his services at a time when he was probably organizing a network in Arab countries whose aim was to destabilize those régimes friendly to the West.

It remains a mystery why, when in 1956 White became head of that



Tom Driberg's photograph in a Moscow park of Guy Burgess (right) and his Russian friend Tolya.

(contraltos) from time to time disguised themselves as girls, and the girls (sopranos) as young men, and the goddess (countertenor) herself as a shepherd, with inevitably provoking consequences. The reader should also be warned that West usually refers to the names of Soviet informers or intelligence operators by their code-names; and as sometimes the FBI has one alias, the CIA another, MIS a third and MIS a fourth, the text becomes such a labyrinth that to thread one's way out of it is more exhausting than slaying the minotaur. For with the defection of Burgess and Maclean, the game of double agents, moles and disinformation gathered pace as it became apparent that not only had the KGB penetrated the Foreign Office but that both MIS and MIS had (or had had) moles within them.

When this unwelcome news was digested, another factor came into play – the well-known rivalry between MIS and MIS. It was never as grave as the antagonisms between the Gestapo, the Abwehr and the Sicherheitsdienst in Nazi Germany, nor even perhaps as fierce as that between the FBI and the CIA. Reviewing this book Woodrow Wyatt has sensibly suggested that perhaps it would be wiser to follow the Soviet example and unite them in one organization. The trouble with sensible suggestions is that the people whom they affect are rarely sensible and remain obsessed by old loyalties. They invariably argue that their own organization is more efficient and the other organization stuffed with cretins. As a result sensible proposals do not get much of a hearing. The further one reads in West's book the clearer it is that some of the operations of MIS immediately affected MIS and vice versa; and the stronger the arguments for one single body become. But how can this be effected if all the chiefs in each are opposed to unification?

In 1956 Macmillan had the excellent idea of getting better cooperation and reinvigorating MIS by transferring Sir Dick White to be its chief. White was by far the best chief MIS ever had. But certainly on one major issue White's

service, Philby was still allowed to operate. For now someone convinced of his guilt was in charge of the organization to which he had belonged. When the most famous of all defectors, Anatoli Golytsin, had identified Philby and Blake, among others, why – unless it was the familiar jealousy between MIS and MIS – was Arthur Martin of MIS taken off the case and one of those in MIS who had believed in Philby's innocence, sent out to Beirut to confront him? The failure to get Philby to return had sombre consequences. His "confession" was palpably less than the whole truth and MIS became convinced that he had been tipped off before he was ever confronted. Who, so it was argued, could have done this but someone in MIS? – and indeed, did not a succession of failures, the escape of Burgess and Maclean and a number of abortive attempts to trap various suspects reinforce this probability?

Meanwhile the redoubtable Golytsin, whose revelations were sensational, alarming, and time and again proved to be true, began to retail theories of Soviet penetration and of the KGB's methods of sowing disinformation. These were to prove far less reliable. Everyone knew Golytsin to be paranoid, insolent, demanding and quixotic. Everyone knew that he saw members of the KGB lurking in every alley and insinuated into every office. But his statements had been so valuable that what he said on any subject came to be accepted as grade A1. Yet he was often to be proved wrong. West does not allude to his political predilections. These were misaligned. Golytsin declared that the breach between China and the Soviet Union was a skillful ploy of disinformation. There was no breach between the two great Communist powers and the West should not be deceived. Appreciations made by political intelligence groups said this was nonsense, but it took several years to disabuse Maurice Oldfield, whose subtle mind responded readily to such tortuous theories. Brilliant officers such as Jim Angleton in Washington

accepted what Golytsin said as gospel, went back over their case-histories and confounded and then were rejected by their superiors. More than one case officer followed Angleton into retirement, disaffected and disgruntled. Golytsin urged that there had been three, four, half-a-dozen Soviet moles burrowing in British intelligence. Surely there must be one at the top of MIS, otherwise why did the KGB allow Blunt to leave it after the war?

And so began the attempt to discover the mole in MIS. First the deputy director was put under investigation, and then, when he was cleared after months of misery and his chief Sir Roger Hollis had retired, Hollis himself was investigated. As West says, the choice was not enviable: if no investigation took place, the suspected mole would continue to operate, yet if an investigation was set in motion the whole organization would be paralysed with self-doubt and new suspicions sown as fast as one was uprooted. Either way the KGB was triumphant. West while admitting that no satisfactory explanation of numbers of incidents ever emerged, judges that the evidence against Hollis was circumstantial and categorically denies him. This is probably right, but what never knew. The report made by Lord Trend did not categorically clear him. Sometimes, so it seems to me, the ingenuity of intelligence officers displayed in weaving theories to account for the unaccountable resembles that of classical scholars justifying emendations in a corrupt text. Chance, misinformation, coincidence and muddle play a far greater part in the information they analyze than their nimble minds allow. So does the irrational. Forty years ago it proved difficult for military intelligence to predict how Hitler would react when the tide of war turned. Intelligence officers could not bring themselves to believe that Hitler could take such irrational military decisions as in fact he took. Only the other day it proved almost as difficult to predict accurately Galtieri's intentions. Explanations can sometimes be too devious to account for "irrational" behaviour on the part of the enemy.

West's account of the stream of cases and the tentative remedies taken is so restrained that by its very sobriety the reader begins to ask himself what a democracy governed by the rule of law can do when its modest security service is swamped by KGB operations. For instance, MIS was humiliated in the courts when Giuseppe Martelli of the Atomic Energy Authority was acquitted after being defended by Jeremy Hutchinson, generally acknowledged to be the most brilliant counsel of his day at the criminal bar. After that case, as West remarks, "the now apparently perfectly legal to own spy equipment and be in contact with the KGB provided one was not caught red-handed". Was Martelli approached by a Soviet agent who had no intention of obtaining secret information from him? Did the Soviet informer who shopped Martelli do so deliberately to expose the loopholes in the law and to sow discord between the FBI and MIS? Such were the suggestions sown by a single verdict in the courts. Hollis was to suffer further defeat in prosecutions with Hutchinson defending which showed that double agents and their like giving evidence were not too easily discredited in the eyes of the stolid British jury. For these setbacks MIS got blamed; I think unjustly.

Indeed Blunt could still have continued to deny his guilt, for it is only if no prosecution could have succeeded against him. Maybe Blunt regarded it as a coup that the offer of immunity from prosecution produced the promise to confess. But may and may not. The lines of West's account his so-called "full collaboration" account his fraud. He seems to have given little away, nothing that was not claimed from other sources. Nothing, for instance, which established the guilt or innocence of Alister Watson, nothing which enabled MIS to make arrests or to regular the strength that it had in the days of Guy Liddell.

After some scandals there was a usual outcry that the vetting procedures current at that time had failed to reveal Communist connections for the spy's past. Each time attempts are made to make yet more thorough vetting into the background of potential

employees. The truth is that positive vetting will continue to be a crude instrument. It depends to a considerable degree on the willingness of referees, friends or acquaintances to speak the whole truth and even to voice suspicions, unwelcome as that may sound. Not everyone is willing to do so. Suppose one is approached by a friend whom one knows to have had a homosexual past in youth, does one decline to be searched? – in which case the decline will be cited for someone who knows nothing about his past (or indeed his present) activities. Or should one accept and tell all, or even more dubiously, refuse one's friend but inform the security services of one's doubts? There can be no doubt that one's duty as a British subject is to tell the truth, and not to sidestep the issue. If someone is employed, or is seeking to be employed, in government service, he accepts *ipso facto* that his past must be an open book. But there may quite genuinely be cases where no vetting could have revealed a suspicious trace.

West makes one categorical statement with which I disagree. The conditions, he writes, which bred the ideological traitors have disappeared. Does he mean by this that spies will be recruited by the KGB and the satellite countries' organizations solely by blackmail, entrapment and financial inducements and that the days are past when genuinely convinced Marxists will be willing to be recruited as spies for the cause of Communism and the subversion of Western democracy?

That would be a most optimistic view. The conditions in British universities and polytechnics in the 1960s and 70s were not all that dissimilar from the 1930s. It is true that among militant student bodies there was no enthusiasm for the Soviet Union. But anyone who had contacts with the International Marxist Group, the International Socialists or their successors, as well as with the Communist Party, and anyone who was among the organizers of the more disgraceful instances of intimidation and disruption in the years of student unrest, should certainly have a trace put against their name. The security services have no doubt made inquiries about the events of those years. The difficulty, as it was in the 1930s, is to discriminate between those who were at that age Trotskyites or members of the Party, but genuinely grew out of the beliefs of their youth, and those who still support the disruption of institutions in the West but have conveniently buried their beliefs. They are at least as dangerous as those well-known activists who have continued the wrecking tactics they practised in the NUS and student unions and who now conduct them in trade unions or in constituency parties. It is not necessary any longer to believe in Maoism or the doctrine of the Frankfurt School in order to sympathize with the aims of those who want to "do something about" the evils of capitalist society – the very appeal which, as it is said, Burgess made to Blunt when he was recruited. What matters is the degree of hatred for the mixed economy of the Western democracies.

You do not have to have been in intelligence yourself or to be a devotee of John le Carré to enjoy these two books. West reminds us just how relentless and single-minded the Soviet Union is in its attempts to disrupt, confound and break the spirit and morale of the West – a fact continually overlooked by so many well-meaning people. Straight believes that the future will be merciful to him and those of his contemporaries who were deluded; and in his last chapter, by quoting from the moving last pages of Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, he echoes Lear's prayer, "Pray you now; forget and forgive..." Anyone who remembers Ivan Karamazov will understand. Unfortunately historians have to consider the matter differently. They will think not of Karamazov but of Peter Vekhovensky and Stavrogin. They will remember that it took two centuries before the ideological struggle between the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation became part of the past, and four centuries for the future to be merciful to both sides.

For these reasons the prosperous merchants, as a matter of conscience,

Alec Cairncross

MANCUR OLSON

The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation, and Social Rigidities
273pp. Yale University Press. £8.95.
0 300 02307 3

Economists are inclined to be distrustful of general theories that purport to explain all the things that appear on Mancur Olson's dust-cover, from economic growth at different times and in many different places to present-day unemployment and stagflation. They have their own models which are more limited in range and are in terms of measurable variables like capital accumulation and market expansion. But as this influential study reminds them, these models do not tell us about "the ultimate causes of growth... what incentives made the saving and investment occur, or what explained the innovations or why there was more innovation and capital accumulation in one society or period than in another. Neither do they explain the silting up of the channels of economic progress."

It is the "silting up" that preoccupies Olson rather than the urge to save or innovate. He assumes that what has to be explained is not so much why development takes place but what holds it back. "In these days", he says, "it takes an enormous amount of stupid policies or bad or unstable institutions to prevent economic development." For an explanation he turns to the obstructive influence of social groups that exert pressure through lobbying or price-fixing to their own advantage and make "distributional gains" at the expense of others. Such group behaviour is not individual behaviour writ large and needs separate study and analysis, such as Olson has already

undertaken in *The Logic of Collective Action*. For the theory of group intervention developed there he claims great explanatory power and in this volume he tests that power in a number of arresting theses.

His argument is that in stable societies small groups pursuing selective interests tend to accumulate over time. Their influence is divisive and lowers efficiency. It becomes more difficult to adopt new technologies or re-allocate resources without protracted negotiations and a progressive slowing-down of the pace of growth. The "distributional coalitions", as Olson calls them, have crowded agendas and complex decision-making processes, so that their decisions are taken slowly and at intervals. This makes them destabilizing because prices and wages do not adjust quickly to changes in market conditions and these changes have to be met by fluctuations in output and employment. It is these lags in adjustment, together with the power to withhold labour at rates above market-clearing levels, that accounts for stagflation.

When the slate is wiped clean, as after a long war or a revolution, the impediments to growth are removed and there is a spurt until sclerosis begins to set in again. Where there are no social upheavals, the distributional coalitions, which may be producers' cartels, trade unions, or other interested groups, take a firm grip. Governmental regulation becomes more complex and wider in scope and decision-taking is slowed down by the need for negotiation and bargaining. Society takes a different direction and the pattern of incentives is fundamentally altered: "the incentive to produce is diminished; the incentive to seek a larger share of what is produced is increased."

Olson is at pains to emphasize that his theory is not a complete

explanation of the phenomena he discusses. It is one element whose importance in relation to others must vary with circumstances. But there are times when he dwells on the relentless increase over time of the influence of special groups as if other influences took second place. One may doubt whether such an increase is in the nature of things. The power of groups depends on the political system and vice versa. Political democracy increases the power of the under-dog and so does full employment; and it is not surprising if that power is exerted through the vote as well as through trade unions, to effect "distributional gains" without much regard to the impact on growth. But this is a consequence of democracy, not social stability. Similarly, the effect of social upheavals on economic incentives extends well beyond what ceases to be mediated through group pressures: in post-war Germany the motives to effort were compelling and the habits formed persisted. On the other hand, it is not at all obvious that the influence of producer cartels and protectionism generally is a function of social rather than economic stability: falling prices and rising unemployment may do more to revive them than a tranquil political system. Even if one takes the British case, where there is not much doubt about the importance of "distributional coalitions" in slowing down growth, what has to be explained is not just the slower rate of growth in comparison with the Continent but the acceleration in comparison with pre-war years to what was probably the fastest rate ever experienced in Britain.

At least there is no suggestion that the forces of obstruction are so indestructible that nothing less than revolution or social upheaval will overcome them. Olson winds up with the hopeful conclusion that, in time, the damage caused by special interests to economic growth, as well as to full

employment, equal opportunity and social mobility, may yet be limited by wider awareness and fuller understanding. As he recognizes, there is something of a paradox in this. It implies that by taking thought (and reading Olson's) stable societies can master the influence he describes. So perhaps they are not all-powerful at all.

On stagflation the thesis advanced is very convincing. It amounts to saying that in the absence of trade unions workers would be free to strike wage bargains at levels that prevented involuntary unemployment. This is by no means obvious. It leaves out of account what governs profits and what goes on in the capital market. If competition forces down prices when wages are reduced, real wages and profit margins are unaffected and unemployment is unchanged. The fact is that wage bargains are not about real wages but about money wages and wage earners may not find it so easy to change real wages as the argument implies. The corollary is that "inadequate aggregate demand is not the main or ultimate source of involuntary employment" is open to the same line of criticism. It is not the failure of the labour market to clear that is at the root of the trouble (although wage demands can force governments into deflationary policies) but the failure of the capital market to maintain a steady flow of expenditure in real terms. That failure is understandable in certain circumstances but does not occur in others. Olson's explanation on the other hand leaves the reader asking why we had an entire generation without stagflation.

The last chapter which deals with all the forces of obstruction are so indestructible that nothing less than revolution or social upheaval will overcome them. Olson winds up with the hopeful conclusion that, in time, the damage caused by special interests to economic growth, as well as to full

Makers of money

Gavin Ewart

EMILY STILES WATTS

The Businessman in American Literature
183pp. Athens: University of Georgia Press. \$16.
0 8203 0616 9

One difficulty with this book, for the British "general reader", will be unfamiliarity with some of the authors treated – arising from a reprehensible ignorance. What "businessman" immediately springs to mind? Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*? The young man Chad in *The Ambassadors*, whose family firm manufactured a necessary but unromantic, unnamed domestic article (chamberpot)? A capitalist monster or two from Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*? The "great" Gatsby? Or the Henry Ford character in *The Hucksters*, the one who upturns the water jug on the boardroom table and tells the presentation team from the advertising agency "It's all wet"? Another trouble is, of course, that work, in general, is very seldom described in detail. People fight, make love, flirt, drink, eat in novels and plays, but they don't often sit at a desk and write letters beginning "Dear Sir".

Emily Watts tells us that *The Rise of Slaves Lapham*, a novel by William Dean Howells, published in 1853, is usually regarded as "the first American business novel". Her thesis is that well before this, and before the anti-business novels of Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis and Upton Sinclair, there was a Puritan tradition of business-bashing among the early settlers. Michael Wiggan's *The Day of Doom* (1622) makes it clear that even honest profit-making is a way to Hell: "Your Gold is brass, your silver dross. Your righteousness is sin. And think you by such honesty eternal life to win? You much mistake, if for its sake you dream of exaltation. Whereas the same deserveth shame and merited damnation." For these reasons the prosperous

always donated a large proportion of their profits to the Puritan cause. Later, with Samuel Sewall (1652-1730) as the supreme example, the capitalist money-maker became more respectable and economic individualism an acceptable way of life.

Watts invokes Weber and Walzer, even D. H. Lawrence (*Studies in Classic American Literature*) and Benjamin Franklin as an authority on economic self-sufficiency and individual liberty. The theories fly around, social, economic (Adam Smith) and, naturally, religious; but examples of businessmen still remain few. And only de Tocqueville says much about literature: "among democratic nations, a writer may flatter himself that he will obtain at a cheap rate a meagre reputation and a large fortune.... Democratic literature is always infested with a tribe of writers who look upon letters as a mere trade; and for some few great authors who adorn it you may reckon thousands of idea-mongers."

Watts sees the "Yankee-Peddler", fast-talking purveyor of usually valueless merchandise, and the more deceitful and immoral Confidence Man, as prototype modern businessmen. Like Sam Slick, Captain Stubb, even Dickens's imported Scrooge, the snake-hissing sibilants of whose names certainly accord with their characters. There follow *Bildad in Moby-Dick* (1851) – one of the few novels that actually treats a business in detail (the capture and butchering of whales) – the Confidence Man himself (Melville's reaction to Barnum's *Autobiography*) and the noble-talking Egbert.

Later businessmen include Dreiser's Frank Cowperwood, Lewis's *Babbalanza* (1922), Hemingway's unnamed salesman in *The Day of Doom* (1937), William Faulkner's nameless Snopes (another snake-like name), Fitzgerald's Gatsby and Monroe Stahr, Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim, Gaddis's *JR* (no relation)... they make a long list; they get nicer, or at least a bit nicer. They have apologists (Gertrude Stein, James Dickey among them); but business itself, being a means to an end (money), remains dull in most of its detail and the Great American Business Novel is yet to come.

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Dwellers in egocentric space

Charles Taylor

GARETH EVANS

The Varieties of Reference
Edited by John McDowell
418pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £15 (paperback, £5.95).
0 19 824665 4

This is the major work on reference that Gareth Evans was working on when he died. It has been put together from his drafts, and his notes, by John McDowell. The result is a powerful, coherent work, whose unfinished nature barely obtrudes. McDowell indicates where Evans intended to expand and develop his argument, and in this sense there was more to be said. But in a subject like this, when does one ever publish a book of which this is not true?

The work is rich in detail. Evans meant his title seriously: he wanted to identify the differences among referring expressions; and the book includes discussions of proper names (Chapter Eleven), demonstrative identification (Chapter Six), self-identification (Chapter Seven), and 'recognition-based' identification (Chapter Eight), among other topics.

But if one were to focus on the central line of argument, the 'main plot', as Evans calls it, it would be this: the main varieties of our referring expressions are 'Russellian', where by 'Russellian', Evans means something like this: a singular term is Russellian, if when it fails to pick out a definite object, the sentence in which it figures fails to say anything, fails to express a thought. In rougher terms, we could say that for these expressions failure of reference renders the sentences in which they are embedded meaningless.

Now of course, in taking this view of our common referring expressions, Evans is disagreeing with Russell. For Russell, the fact that this was a feature of genuine referring expressions (genuine 'proper names') was enough to show that the expressions we use in ordinary life to pick things out ('the King of France', 'the man over there', 'the woman we met yesterday') are not truly referring. For we seem to be saying something, even when we fail to pick out anyone (eg when we say 'the King of France is bald'). Moreover, we seem to be able to know that an expression is meaningful even when we aren't sure whether it picks out an object; so the meaning of these expressions must be independent of the existence of designated objects.

Combined with a Humean-type epistemology, this drove Russell in his *Logical Atomism* to the bizarre conclusion that only certain short-lived sense-data qualified as objects of real proper names. Even expressions like 'that man over there' purported to refer to objects which for all we really know might not exist, and hence their meaning could not be that of genuine referring expressions. As is well known, Russell interpreted the meaning of these expressions as involving existential assertions. 'The King of France is bald' becomes, something like: 'There is a single person who is King of France and he's bald'.

In defending the 'Russellian' status of these ordinary expressions, Evans is therefore contradicting Russell. But he is doing so in a novel way. We might think that Russell made a lot of unnecessary trouble for himself, because he failed to pick up on one of the great innovations of Frege: the distinction between sense and reference. Russell still operates with the 'one-dimensional' conception of meaning which descends from Hobbes and the great empiricists. The meaning of an expression is the object it designates or describes. Frege saw that two expressions can designate the same object and yet be importantly different in meaning (eg, 'the morning star' 'the evening star'). This dimension of meaning was the 'sense', and could be thought of as the way one comes to pick out the object designated.

And so one might think that a way to avoid Russell's rather strained conclusions would be to recognize that failed referring expressions go on having and conferring meaning in

virtue of their sense. Because there are two dimensions of meaning, we don't need to deny them all meaning once we recognize that they fail in one.

But Evans doesn't take this route in contradicting Russell. He makes a much more radical break. This use of the sense/reference distinction still trades on a background distinction between subject and world. The expression fails of reference because there is no object out there, but the subject has a way in which he intended to pick out an object (even though he goofed on this occasion), and so he has a grip on what he means. Evans doesn't want to use the distinction in this way. Indeed, he would argue that for Frege, the sense of a given term is as public and objective a property as its referent. What he wants to do, rather, is break with the whole subject/world distinction which comes down to us from Descartes and the empiricists, and which is still so strongly influential in contemporary thought, and often in disguised ways. In challenging this outlook, Evans's arguments often converge in a striking way with those deployed by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Michael Polanyi, although there is no question whatever of influence here, while his analysis sometimes invokes Wittgenstein, on whose work he has drawn.

It is a crucial property of the Cartesian outlook that it tightly segregates thought from matter. 'One of the requirements which flow from this is that we ought to privilege what we can call (following Nagel) objective descriptions of the world. This means that we ought to describe external reality, and the subject's relations to it, even the subject himself in so far as he is part of it, in terms which are as detached as possible from the lived experience of subjects. Things shouldn't be described in the *meanings* they have for subjects - terrifying, attractive, dismaying, hopeful, and so on (to avoid confusion with linguistic meaning, let me call these 'significance descriptions').'

A consequence of this is that we relegate all talk of the significance of things, as well as all thinking, all awareness, to another domain, that of 'ideas', which are essentially distinguishable from external reality. It is part of the classical Cartesian-empiricist notion of an 'idea' that it has a determinate content quite *in* the world; or of what it might or might not represent. Ideas stand over against the objective world. They may picture it, but they are radically separate from it. This notion of an idea is overdetermined in the classical theory. It arises partly as an inevitable consequence of a thorough-going objective description of things (thought is, as it were, expelled from the world. But it may also correspond to a desire to identify within thought itself a kernel which is clear-bound, certain, incorrigible. This was the case with Descartes.

Some of the inheritors of this Cartesian tradition have become straight materialists, and have no place for mind. But it is very hard to construct a theory of linguistic meaning without invoking any significance descriptions at all. B. F. Skinner's attempt hardly encourages one to try. And so people within the Cartesian outlook have tended in their theories of meaning to invoke something like the classical ideas - notions, pictures,

portrayals of things, which can be specified independently of what they are about. Russell is a case in point.

But there are two salient features of thought so understood: it tends to be seen as disembodied, ie, in only causal and contingent relation with the thinker's body; it tends to be atomistic, because thought goes on within individual minds. Could it be that these make the Cartesian outlook incapable of providing the context for an adequate theory of meaning? Could it be that human language is such that it is essentially the practice of *embodied* context-making which they elaborate in *common*?

Evans goes some considerable way to showing that the answer to both these questions is 'yes'. This is what is novel and exciting about his book. The case for embodied and sociality is not argued in general terms; rather they are shown to provide the essential context making our referential practices intelligible.

I have space only to look at one aspect of this, the discussion of demonstrative identification in Chapter Six. Here Evans shows how our ability to identify things demonstratively, through terms like 'here' and 'this', depends on our being situated in a way given by the concepts 'up' and 'down', 'left' and 'right', and 'in front' and 'behind'. (His discussion here is a times reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's in the introduction to *La phénoménologie de la perception*.) This is the space we (at least partially) know how to get around in and manipulate things in. Within this space, the localization of a thing can be fixed for us by what we can do to get it, or reach it. Talking about our localizing things through auditory perception, Evans says: 'the spatial information embodied in auditory perception is specifiable only in a vocabulary whose terms derive their meaning partly from being linked with bodily actions.'

Now this kind of space defies the tight segregation of Cartesian theory. By hypothesis, space is described here in significance terms; so this can't be extra-mental reality; we must be dealing with a subjective 'idea'. But egocentric space isn't an idea either. It is not a picture I have of reality, specifiable quite independently of that reality. Being able to identify the thing the sound is coming from is like being able to touch it or grab it; indeed, it is inextricably linked with my being able to touch it or grab it. If we want to understand egocentric space as an understanding I have of space, then it is one which presupposes that I can actually grasp real things, which I can touch and grab. You can't separate this understanding, and specify its content, in abstraction from what it bears on. It's not a picture of reality, but an ability to deal with it. So we aren't dealing with 'ideas' any more. (The refutation of this conception of 'ideas' is one of the central theses of early Heidegger, as Hubert Dreyfus showed in his review of *Problems of Phenomenology*, TLS, September 17, 1982).

The Cartesian outlook always leans to a view which makes description primary in identification. My understanding of the world has to be seen as a picture, a cognitive map I possess. I identify things and places in it by their co-ordinates, as it were; just

as in visiting Madrid as a tourist I find the Prado by first determining how my map that it is three blocks east of my hotel. And so a Cartesian will be tempted to translate the point about egocentric space into cognitive map language. 'You identify the source of the sound', he is tempted to say, 'as 'the thing I touch when I move my arm up and right'.'

Evans shows how wrong this construal would be. I don't identify the sonorous object *via* the description 'the thing I touch when I move my arm up and right', as I do the Prado in 'the building three blocks east of my hotel'. For most of the things I know how to reach and to identify, I don't make descriptions at all, and might be hard put to devise accurate ones. In normal case, I would only formulate a description like 'the thing I touch', in order to help someone else identify the object. But in doing this I am drawing on the ability I already have to identify the object, not setting out the path which leads me to it. I am like a tourist, rather than like the tourist. Moreover, I couldn't use descriptions and cognitive maps to get around and find some things, if I were not already embedded in a space where I can do other things without descriptions. Evans shows, we can only use ourselves with cognitive maps because we can locate our egocentric space within their framework. The Cartesian world is the impossible one in which one is a tourist everywhere and a native nowhere.

Evans's claim that demonstrative identifying terms are Russellian presupposes an entirely different context from Russell's, as does his parallel view of other common varieties of reference. From the Cartesian point of view, where the inner thought is separated from outer reality, we can easily imagine that the failure to contact something out there leaves the inner picture unaffected. And so we can still hold that there's something 'that he meant to say' something 'that he meant to say'. But if we think of the speaker as an embodied agent, conversing with others, and our referring expressions as aimed, as it were, at a target, that something goes wrong there is no necessarily a clearly demarcated residue. There may be, but often there is not.

The analogy with action illustrates this. If I try to encompass something and fail, there may not be any action, description which picks out a lesser end which I nevertheless do achieve. There may of course be, as we see with complicated strategic action, I send you a self-abasing letter to gain your forgiveness. You remain adamant. But nevertheless, I succeeded in putting the tone I wanted into the letter. But when I reach for a sugar and knock over the cream, that is just nothing I attempted, and accomplished. All is muddle and chaos. Similarly with reference. I say 'the judge we met yesterday', but there were really two, and I didn't distinguish them, then there will be nothing determinate that I succeed in saying. Like with the spill cream, it is muddle and chaos. There will of course be some *thoughts* going through my mind. But the question 'What is the relevance of this to the issue, whether anything is said, or whether there is any thought in the Fregean sense.

And raising this issue takes us to the theory of meaning out of the Cartesian context into the common space sustained by embodied agents. It is this which gives its extraordinary scope and richness to Evans's work. His detailed discussion of some of the important issues of reference and meaning opens onto the fundamental question of the human context in which they have to be understood. Evans is in the course of bringing about an exciting and fruitful dialogue between philosophy and social sciences and other. His assumption of the *Reader'ship* at Oxford was both a recognition of this and a promise. This book, fascinating in itself, also goes beyond to what we have lost. It gives us a regret all the more keenly felt. Evans's early death.

Coming Out

Leaning against the window,
Legs pressed languorously to the radiator,
I spot the first sign of spring
In a bleak slice of garden over the back fence.
An arm - upright as a cable car arm -
Is trotting a duster along a washing line.
Wiping away winter, Soon, swelling and rising
On zephyrs, the first washing is in bloom.

Connie Bensley

Is He or isn't He?

Bernard Williams

J. L. MACKIE

The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the existence of God
286pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
£12.20 (paperback, £4.95).
0 19 824665 X

The late J. L. Mackie was a notably clear and hard-headed philosopher who brought great powers of argument and a demanding intellectual integrity to a wide range of subjects. He wrote with force and insight about logic, theory of knowledge, philosophy of science, ethics and the history of philosophy, and now, after his early death, which was a great loss to the subject, we have a book in the philosophy of religion. It is very largely, as its subtitle claims, a study of arguments for and against the existence of God, though it extends naturally enough, and disappointingly, to the discussion of some believers who have written in favour of trying to get by without any arguments.

Mackie was an analytic philosopher, but his philosophy was not in any conspicuous or interesting sense linguistic. After all those books of the 1930s and early 60s which took up the 'language' of religious belief, it is striking that Mackie dismisses in a line or two problems specifically about the meaning of religious statements. He finds it for the most part fairly obvious what they mean, or at least those that assert or deny the existence of God or express his more general properties; I think that Mackie might have had greater difficulty with the meaning of some more specific Christian claims, such as the Trinity or the Incarnation. Mackie's problem is not about what it means to say that God exists, but whether it is true, and what reason there is to think it true.

He had in general a great respect for the natural sciences and a lot of his work concerned the relation of his

picture of the world that is given by them to our other beliefs and reasoning. In this, too, Mackie differed from linguistic philosophy, though not so much from the logical positivism that preceded it. What his work most resembled, in fact, was a kind of analytical philosophy that preceded both of them, the philosophy of Broad and of Bertrand Russell. It is very much the spirit of Russell - though I do not think that his name is mentioned - that is to be found in this book: a spirit which is rational, sceptical, benevolent and firmly failing to conceal, at crucial moments, contempt for the evasive and hatred for the fanatical.

Mackie differs from Russell inasmuch as his arguments are longer and more careful, the history is more accurate and the finish is a lot less brilliant. There are also far fewer jokes, though Mackie does turn one dry pleasantry about the American philosopher Alvin Plantinga, who is thought by some to have rehabilitated the Ontological Argument by his researches in modal logic: 'So perhaps St Alvin will... take his place beside St Anselm; at least he will have no difficulty in meeting the miracle-working requirement for canonization, after the success he has achieved in subverting (as Hume would say) all the principles of the understanding of so many intelligent readers.'

Some of the text seems a little dutiful, and the amount of explanation given to various subjects is sometimes surprising; Berkeley's arguments, and Descartes' proof of God from our idea of him, collect a lot of detail, though neither can now seem at all compelling, while, on the other hand, the inexperienced reader who wants to consider Plantinga's claims to sainthood is not given much help with his apparatus of 'possible worlds'. But this is a minor oddness of a book which, so far as the arguments of natural theology go, treats them with very great clarity, accuracy and intellectual care. For a detailed and perspicuous account of how it now stands with the First Cause Arguments, the Argument to Design

(as Mackie rightly calls it) and the rest, I know of no book that does it better than this, and anyone who thinks that these arguments do anything to strengthen their conclusion has very powerful negative considerations from Mackie to content with.

What the book does is to deal with those traditional arguments - no less, and, just about, no more. Mackie is above all interested in the arguments, and more than that, he loses interest in these arguments psychologically, as Mackie would concede, nor try to provide a new argument (which will, as Mackie insists, be a bad one), but which rather invoke a conception of what religion does which seems remote from the spirit of these arguments. It is here that Mackie's approach seems to concede too little to religion: too little, that is to say, to the needs that it has served. He does indeed consider possible causes of religious belief, but, once more, in relation to an argument about truth. Is it an argument for the truth of religious belief that it exists at all? Of course it is not, since many causes of religious belief have been suggested, some of which could be adequate and not at all involve its truth. Feuerbach, Marx, Freud and others are thus 'appropriately' mentioned, and to deal with the argument, that is enough.

But as soon as one sees religion, as Mackie rightly does, as a purely human phenomenon, it becomes a matter of great importance what human phenomenon it is, and which of these explanations, if any, is true. In particular, it is a crucial question whether the account of religion that one eventually has is one that represents its content - above all, its more unnerving and anti-humanist content - as something alien to humanity and its needs, now simply abandoned by advanced thought, or rather sees it as expressing needs that will have to be expressed in some form when the belief in God has disappeared.

A book which is as admirable as this, in many and not merely intellectual ways, and which confines itself to working its way, with negative results, through these arguments, must raise the question of where these ways of going on now stand. Its approach, it seems to me, concedes at once too little and too much to religion. It concedes too much to these arguments in pretending that it is an open question whether they could deliver their conclusion. They may in their various ways have incidental logical and philosophical interest, as involving one or another fallacy or equivocation, but I wonder what unbeliever now could be

swayed by them towards belief, or what believer, looking for intellectual reassurance, could find it in them. It is not so much that Hume and Kant, to whom Mackie with characteristic candour and clarity expresses his debts, broke up most of this furniture a long time ago, but rather that the world since then has drastically damaged the rooms in which it used to stand.

Someone who is drawn to religion now - here at least, and I do not speak of Teheran - will be drawn to it by needs which do not simply come before these arguments psychologically, as Mackie would concede, nor try to provide a new argument (which will, as Mackie insists, be a bad one), but which rather invoke a conception of what religion does which seems remote from the spirit of these arguments. It is here that Mackie's approach seems to concede too little to religion: too little, that is to say, to the needs that it has served. He does indeed consider possible causes of religious belief, but, once more, in relation to an argument about truth. Is it an argument for the truth of religious belief that it exists at all? Of course it is not, since many causes of religious belief have been suggested, some of which could be adequate and not at all involve its truth. Feuerbach, Marx, Freud and others are thus 'appropriately' mentioned, and to deal with the argument, that is enough.

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It is because of these questions that the issues remain with philosophy. I might be said, and Mackie himself might have said it, that after the issues of truth and argument have been laid aside, there is no philosophy of religion, or at least no decent philosophy of religion, but only anthropology or another social science to help us, or perhaps the imaginative powers of literature. That may be right, so far as something called the philosophy of religion is concerned, but it is not the end of philosophy's involvement with religion. For in moral philosophy at least, and in the reflections about society and about the mind that must be part of it, there must be some attitude involved towards the needs that religion has served, and some consequences to be drawn from the ways in which it has served them.

In one of his more Russellian moments, dealing with Kierkegaard, Mackie says: 'We are, in effect, back with the god of the Book of Job, and whatever we may think of Job himself, there can be no doubt that Jehovah comes out of that story very badly.' But the author of the Book of Job knew that; or at any rate he knew something that raised the question for him very clearly. That religion can be, as Mackie points out, a nasty business, is a fact built into any religion worth worrying about, and that is one reason why it has seemed to so many people the only adequate response to the nasty business that everything is.

That does not make it true, and Mackie's truthful, reasonable and humane book tells us that very clearly. At the end of its forceful and economical arguments, however, one faces a paradox which arises from its own destructive success. It is only if religion is true that the most interesting question about it is its truth. If it is false, the most interesting question about it is not the truth or even the reasonableness of what it claims to tell us about the cosmos, but the content of what it actually tells us about humanity.

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465pp. Dent. £15.
0 460 04248 3

Perhaps you have once or twice laid down that book *David Copperfield* and thought, "How dearly that boy must have loved me, and how vividly this man remembers it!"

Dickens is writing in 1855 to Maria Beadnell, whom he has not seen for over ten years, and whose reappearance was to inspire the disenchanted remembrance of Arthur Clennam and Flora Finching in *Little Dorrit*. The whole episode, and this letter in particular, perfectly illustrates the interplay between Dickens's real and fictive treatment of women, which is the subject of Michael Slater's book. Dickens's interest here is not in Maria, but in Maria's possible response to his feelings; more exactly, to his fictional version of his adult memories of the youthful love of "Dora". No wonder that in the fiction, as Slater points out, it does not occur to him to find anything ridiculous in Clennam's sentimental illusion that Flora, twenty-five years on, will be unchanged. It is fat, silly, romantic, chattering Flora who is made ridiculous.

This venereal sacrifice of Maria, in life as in art, on the altar of Dickens's emotions, suggests the two central problems for his book. One is that it is difficult to disentangle the characters of the women from Dickens's imperious imaginative uses of them. Slater works hard to "bring into focus" mother, sister, wife, sisters-in-law, daughters and mistress. (Oddly, although her importance in Dickens's life is everywhere apparent, there is no separate chapter for Angela Burdett-Coutts; because there was a professional, not a domestic, relationship?) But I felt by the end that his life should have been "Dickens's women". They don't have much life of their own. Kate's reminiscences about her father, Catherine's few pathetic traces ("If I were ever to see him by chance it would almost kill me"), Mary Hogarth's chatty notes, are the exception; most of these voices are doubly "shut up", first by the gaps in historical documentation, then by Dickens's fictions. And the other problem is that Dickens's fictionalizing of his life is enormously complex and peculiar, and it seems almost impossible for the writer who is hovering between biography and criticism not to oversimplify or misrepresent.

Slater tackles his rich materials methodically, by dividing the book into three parts. In the first, "Experience

into Art", there is a chapter for Dickens's relationship with each of his women; in the second, there is a chronological account of his fictional treatment of women; finally, there is a summary of his "womanly ideal", deduced from his journalism as well as from his novels and stories.

Some of the biographical material - Dickens's resentment at his mother for letting him go back to the blacking factory, his devotion to his sister, his idealization of Mary Hogarth after her death - is already familiar to readers of Edgar Johnson, Philip Collins and other Dickensians. But Slater carefully re-examines much of the evidence. The break with Maria after 1833 may not have been as dramatic as has been supposed; Mary's affectionate relationship with her dazzling brother-in-law was probably "far less intense and more normal" than people have thought; Ellen Ternan may not have been, as she has been represented, "a hard-hearted little gold-digger". The usual criticisms of Catherine, Dickens's wife, for "clumsiness, lassitude and inefficiency" are reconsidered. Slater shows how Johnson loaded the dice against her: for example, during the move to a new house, Dickens described Catherine as being "all over paint"; Johnson "introduces an idea of mooning vacancy" by paraphrasing this as "Catherine's part was limited to wandering about getting herself 'all over paint'".

Though Slater's reinterpretations are mostly in the service of moderation and reasonableness, he doesn't sidestep the more bizarre or outrageous details of Dickens's family life: Catherine's jealousy of his erotic mesmerizing sessions with a neurotic Swiss lady; his offhand references to his wife's pregnancies and two miscarriages ("I may be considered to have done enough towards my country's population"), which Slater does his best to humanize; his repugnance to the idea of contraceptives; his obtaining a doctor's certificate of virginity for his sister-in-law Georgina as a way of quashing "scurrilous innuendoes". There are vivid cameos throughout: Dickens, aged nineteen, looking "sulky as a bear" if his mother danced with anyone at a family holiday in Broadstairs; "blackery at the seaside encountering" the great Dickens with his wife and children; Miss Hogarth all looking abominably coarse vulgar and happy; his neat household contrivances ("We used to laugh at him sometimes and say we believed that he was personally acquainted with every nail in the house"); Mrs Carlyle complaining about Catherine's lavish hospitality ("Such an overloaded desert! -

pyramids of figs raisins oranges - ach!"); a sighting of Dickens on "the Boulogne packet" with (presumably) Ellen Ternan: "travelling with him was a lady not his wife, nor his sister-in-law, yet he strutted about the deck with the air of a man bristling with self-importance"; and his last talk with his daughter Kate on a quiet summer night: "Again he was silent, gazing wistfully through the darkened windows; and then in a low voice spoke of his own life, and many things that he had scarcely ever mentioned to me before."

When he comes to the "fictionalizing" of the life, Slater continues reasonable and scrupulous. He would not agree with this sort of feminist critique of Dickens:

As versions of womanhood, his abstracted ideals and caricatures are without substance or inner complexity; indeed they are without any kind of reality at all. (Patricia Stubbs, *Women and Fiction*, 1979).

By contrast, Slater would argue that Dora is one of Dickens's "most impressive achievements", both as an "individual" and as "the embodiment of a critique of women's position in Victorian society". He holds that Dickens's translations of real women into his art are more indirect, as well as more successful, than has been supposed. Estella has more of Maria than of Ellen Ternan and Dickens's feelings about Maria are also part of David's admiration for Steerforth. Little Nell, the sensitive betrayed child, is more "like" Dickens's idea of himself as a child than she is "like" Mary Hogarth. More generally, Slater points to the extraordinary mixture of women as "viragoes" (his word), destroyers and angels of death, and women as "angels of the house". He notices the coy treatment of flirtatiously domesticated brothers, sisters, and the association of comfortable middle-aged women with nice things to eat. And he sums up Dickens's attitude to women persuasively. In life, Dickens could be shrewd about female characteristics (his guess that *Scenes of Clerical Life* was written by a woman is a brilliant piece of analysis) and was sympathetic, up to a point, with working women, admiring Adelaide Procter's work for the Society for the Employment of Women. But he did not want them to move out of the domestic sphere:

We should doubt the expediency of her putting up for Marylebone, or being one of the Board of Guardians, for St Pancras, or serving on a Grand Jury for Middlesex, or acting as High-Sheriff of any county, or taking the chair at a Meeting on the subject of the Income-Tax. (1851)

Spiritual emblems

Dennis Walder

BARRY V. QUALLS

The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction: The novel as book of life
217pp. Cambridge University Press.
£19.50 (paperback, £6.95).
0 521 24408 0

The religious beliefs of the major Victorian novelists have, on the whole, received a bad press. When George Eliot's Dinah Morris left preaching on the village green to marry Adam Bede, the *British Quarterly Review* found it "inexpressibly disappointing" that such a good Methodist should become a "beer-chomping, foot-sucking, housewife". Dickens's rum-and-pineapple Stiggins, his oily Chadband, not surprisingly led evangelical scribes to complain that he knew "as much of the ways and manners of religious people as a Hottentot!", while the question raised by *Jane Eyre* in the minds of certain Anglicans was whether the author had "any defined notions of religion at all".

Nowadays it is generally accepted that Charlotte Brontë, Dickens and George Eliot were at least believers of some sort. The trouble is of what sort, exactly? To paraphrase Dr Johnson on Milton's religion, we know rather what

they were not, than what they were. They rejected evangelical excess, hypocrisy, Puseyism, missionaries: what did they support? Barry Qualls's fruitful and provocative "reading" of selected works by these three authors suggests that they all, in their own distinctive but related ways, sought to redefine the English Puritan tradition, creating "secular scriptures" which were intended to "school their readers' hearts into a recognition of the spiritual ties which yet might be understood to bind mankind together. Qualls identifies Carlyle as the seminal figure in the process whereby the Victorians transformed their inheritance, invoking the Romantic doctrine of "natural supernaturalism" to ratify their urge to find a spiritual meaning in a material world. According to Qualls, the major novelists (defined to exclude Thackeray and Trollope, which limits the discussion somewhat) were determined to write "biblical romances" in which hero or heroine searched for meaning and security; a search inevitably defined in terms of "the types, analogues, and allegorical suggestions of the popular religious tradition".

The focus of the argument is language. The Victorian novelists' attempts to spiritualize the world were expressed in a language rooted in the Bible and Bunyan; indeed, their characteristic procedure, according to

Qualls, was to "emblemize" reality, drawing on the old tradition of Francis Quarles's little allegorical devices to focus this preoccupation. The mirror, the prison, the dunghill, the labyrinth, the rescue of the shipwrecked pilgrim: the spiritual issues implicit in these traditional figures are reactualized by their continued deployment in novels such as *Jane Eyre*, *Dombey and Son*, *Silas Marner* or *Daniel Deronda*. Thus the "great looking-glass" Jane Eyre remembers from her incarceration in the Red Room early on in her history alerts us to the scene's significance: suggesting the possibility of being trapped in vain self-regard, but also, in the words of one of Quarles's vainly-mirror emblem quotations, suggesting that "the best looking-glass, wherein to see thy God, is perfectly to see thyself". The Romantic thrust towards self-fulfilment in Charlotte Brontë's heroine is always tempered by the Christian sense of the dangers of the unfettered imagination: as she remarks to Rochester when she refuses his bigamous proposal, he should "trust in God and yourself".

And yet the balance between secular and spiritual demands which seem to be implied by such a remark is contradicted by the *human* insistence, the insistence upon human aid and communion which Brontë considers finally, essential to salvation. Qualls

fiction, not an account of Georgian childhood."

The easygoing language and orderly structure of the book suggest that not enough thinking has been done about the obscure and complex transpositions between life and art. *Dickens and Women* wages a jocular, no-nonsense, very English rear-guard action against extreme or difficult interpretations. "The more sophisticated can, I suppose, read what a phallic meaning they wish" (John Steerforth's throwing a hammer at Rosa Dartle). "Whether, as some critics have alleged, Dickens intended his more sophisticated readers to understand that Miss Wade is actually a lesbian... is really of little moment." But the subject is full of extremes and difficulties, and this, blithe approach doesn't begin to account for the peculiarities of Dickens's mind, or for the strangeness of some of Dickens's women:

Roast pig! I hardly think we ever could have had one, now I come to remember, for your papa could never bear the sight of them in the house, and used to say that they always put him in mind of very little babies, only the pigs had much fairer complexions; and he had a horror of little babies, too, because he couldn't very well afford any increase to his family, and had a natural dislike to the subject. (Mr Nickleby.)

It isn't our stations in life that changes us, Mr Clennam; thoughtless free! - As I was saying, I was thinking of one thing and thinking of another, and thinking very much of the family. Not of the family in the present times only, but in the past times too. For when I was a child, I began thinking of one thing and thinking of another, in that manner as it's getting dark, what I say is, but all times seem to be present, and a person must get out of that state and consider before they can say which which. (Mrs Ticklet.)

Dare I hint at that worse time when, strung together somewhere in great black space, there was a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which I was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the reel, and when it was such inexplicable agony and misery to be a part of the dreadful thing? (Esther.)

"Are you in pain, dear mother?" "I think there's a pain somewhere in the room," said Mrs Gradgrind, "but I couldn't positively say that I have got it."

the more robust Jane Eyre before her, also involves a Romantic search for authentic selfhood, defined in terms of innocence and the sanctity of "natural" feelings. But if she senses everything her life operating through the *aeternitatis*, Dickens adds, through the voice of his impersonal narrator, a corrosive, doom-laden prosecco which sees no more than cause for Oth's vengeance. Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot are more hopeful, if less reliant on God; but it is in Dickens that the contradictions are most blatant; the pilgrimage most obvious, and most obviously futile.

Barry Qualls's "reading" of his three chosen novelists is limited by his lack of biographical or historical perspective: a lack damagingly evident in his loose way with the term "emblem", which slides about from its usual seventeenth-century sense to a hazy associative idea that anything "symbolic" may be so labelled. Nevertheless, in the rich, and richly difficult, task of teasing out the implications of the popular religious sources of the great Victorian novel, he provides a helpful hand.

Years Annual No. 2, edited by Richard J. Fineran (158pp; Macmillan: £3.95; 333 32456 0), includes articles on "Byzantium" by Herbert J. Lyons and on "Yeats and Katherine Tynan" by Carolyn Holdsworth.

Colonists in California

S. S. Prawer

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

Strangers in Paradise: The Hollywood Emigrés 1933-1950
256pp. Faber. £8.25.
0 571 11700 7

In his definitive study *Bertolt Brecht in America*, James K. Lyon showed how bright a light may be shed by a judicious combination of sophisticated literary and cultural criticism on the problems faced when they tried to adapt their broken careers in Hollywood. John Russell Taylor's methods and materials are different. He has used published memoirs, biographies and film-reviews, together with specialized studies like that of Lyon, to sketch a much broader picture of émigrés from many countries and to include in his panorama not only film-makers of many kinds, but also those who came to Los Angeles and its surroundings in search of things other than fame, fortune and creative opportunities in moving pictures. The questions he asks include: "What did it feel like to be Thomas Mann or Bertolt Brecht or Arnold Schoenberg or Theodor Adorno in Los Angeles in the 1940s? How did these German/Austrian exiles relate to one another? How far, if at all, did they fit in with their environment? What effect did they have on America and what effect did America have on them?"

The first of these questions is the last well answered. Mr Taylor never permesides us that he is sufficiently well acquainted with the work of creative writers outside the film-world to tell us anything significant about their inner life or the development of their work. Again and again one feels that his judgment is based on unsound premises. Could anyone at all acquainted with Brecht's work from

the 1920s onwards really believe that he had not been chased back to Europe by the Committee on Un-American Activities he might be "virtually forgotten today"? How can someone who has even glanced at the title-page of Mann's *Doctor Faustus* commit himself to the statement that in that novel Mann "took up the subject he knew he needed to expose, the story of twentieth-century Germany, refracted through the experience of one fictional character, Adrian Leverkühn"? The most striking formal characteristic of *Doctor Faustus*, announced by a title that includes the words "as told by a friend", is of course that Leverkühn's experience is itself refracted through the consciousness of a second character, the narrator and arranger Serenus Zeitblom. One cannot help feeling that Taylor has cast his net too wide; that he would have done better to confine himself to émigrés connected with the film-world. He might then have been able to expand such an unsurprising statement as the one which tells us that German émigré actors found themselves condemned to play "a variety of sneering Nazis" by attempting to differentiate between their performances in such parts and to relate these to their earlier and later careers. Conrad Veidt's Nazis are obviously as different from Alexander Granach's as Albert Bassermann's titled fellow-traveller in *The Searching Wind* is from Walter Slezak's aristocratic agent in *Once Upon A Honeymoon*. Here too the question "What did it feel like?" might be pertinently raised. What satisfaction, if any, did Granach derive from playing those he hated most - the Jew-baiter Streicher in *The Hitler Gang*, a concentration-camp chief and torturer in *The Seventh Cross*? How did Martin Koscielec view a career devoted almost entirely to portraying a Goebbels far handsomer and more fascinating than the original? How did their Hollywood experiences and performances affect what important figures like Fritz Kortner and Curt Bois did after their return to Europe?

Brecht once summed up his feelings about Hollywood in a little poem which reads:

Every morning, to earn my bread
I go to the market where lies are bought.
Hopefully
I take my place among the vendors.

How many felt like that? How many obtained greater satisfactions than Brecht managed to do? *Strangers in Paradise* suggests some of the answers by means of important distinctions between the career and attitudes of film-directors who stayed on after the war - Lang, Preminger, Billy Wilder - and who therefore committed themselves to Hollywood and its ways; directors who, like Renoir and René Clair, made important films in their Californian years but then returned to their native country; and directors who stayed on the fringes, knowing that they could not work in the studio system in any really creative way, and for whom the war-years were therefore an interlude of waiting and watching. Luis Buñuel is, of course, the greatest example of this last category.

What *Strangers in Paradise* does exceedingly well is to distinguish the various groups of Californian exiles and to suggest their inter-relationship and their relation to other groups within and without the Hollywood studios. Taylor isolates a number of important figures and locales that provided centres for such groups: Ernst Lubitsch, Charles Laughton, Preston Sturges; the homes of Thomas Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Salma Viertel and Alma Mahler-Werfel; the Garden of Allah Hotel. We learn to distinguish a French colony, a German/Austrian colony, and - very important indeed - a colony of British exiles, with such centres as the Hollywood Cricket Club, whose main stalwarts were C. Aubrey Smith and the gentle Englishman who terrified the world under the name Boris Karloff. The book is particularly good on this British group; it has wise things to say about the (usually unjustified) charges that its members had deserted their native country in its hour of need, and dispels some widespread misconceptions

about its nature and coherence. Here the author has had the benefit of personal acquaintance with Boris Karloff and other participants in his story, and has collected much relevant material for his recent biography of the most famous of all English émigré directors: Alfred Hitchcock. He reminds us, incidentally, that Hollywood was not the only place in which refugee artists from Hitler's "new order" were brought into culturally fruitful contact with British colleagues. Many of the Europeans who come under his scrutiny worked, for a time, in England; and a study of their place within, and their impact upon, British film-making and publishing would provide an interesting and worthwhile supplement to *Strangers in Paradise*.

In a book that covers as much ground as this one there will obviously be room for disagreement. Many will feel, for instance, that while it is good to have points made and reinforced by anecdotes, one would like, in a historical context, to be given some inkling of their source. We are told for instance, of a "surrealistic encounter" between Eisenstein and Sam Goldwyn, in the course of which Goldwyn said: "Please tell Mr Eisenstein that I have seen his film *Potemkin* and admire it very much. What we should like would be for him to do something of the same kind, but rather cheaper, for Ronald Colman." *Bien trouvé*, of course - but is it true? On what evidence does Mr Taylor assert that what Sternberg came from Germany to direct was "his own" adaptation of Heinrich Mann's *Professor Unrat*? *The Blue Angel*'s credit-titles, and a good deal of testimony from participants other than Sternberg himself, tell a different story. Nor is the description of the character Marlene Dietrich plays in that film as that of a "vicious" cabaret-singer at all well judged. Lola-Lola is no more "vicious", surely, than Pabst's (and Wedekind's) Lulu, whose name *The Blue Angel* deliberately recalls. There are other places where summary pronouncements on films, characters and directors may be thought

unnecessarily simplistic or distorting. This book's own testimony to the connection between German fantastic films, English "Gothic" traditions, and Hollywood film-making, would seem to invalidate its description of James Whale's work as "coming from nothing and leading to nothing". Nor can I think the total impression of Whale's first *Frankenstein* movie adequately described by the phrase "ruthlessly funny".

These are matters of opinion and interpretation; but there are also, inevitably, some errors to be corrected. German titles and names should be rescrutinized and forms like *Der Lauffer von Marathon*, "Helene Wiesel" (three times!) and "Frank Theiss" replaced by "Läufer", "Weigel" and "Thiess". Telling us twice, as this book does, that William Dieterle was "Murnau's past", does not make it so; Faust was played by Gösta Ekman, while Dieterle, later famous for his Muni biopics, played the comparatively minor part of Gretchen's brother Valentin. And it is surely misleading to say that Max Reinhardt went to the East Coast to direct "a new play by Thornton Wilder, *The Merchant of Yonkers*" without at least mentioning the reason why Reinhardt was thought the ideal director: the fact that this "new" play was based on a Viennese original by Johann Nestroy.

It would be churlish as well as wearisome to multiply such complaints. True, *Strangers in Paradise* casts its net so wide that specialities and errors become much more likely than they are in a monograph as thoroughly researched and thought through as that of Lyon. But the book has mapped its territory well; it has placed a large number of writers, composers and film-makers in significant context; it has shown the Germanic roots of American film noir; and it points the way to further studies which will augment, enrich, deepen and - on occasions - correct what, if so usefully and amusingly tells us.

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Thomas Rowlandson, Dinner in the City, pen and grey and brown ink with watercolour, 15 by 23 cm. Estimate: £1,000-1,500.

Cornell

When Clarissa, in Samuel Richardson's epistolary masterpiece *Clarissa Harlowe*, writes of love, "I am but a cypher, to give him significance, and myself pain," that sentence evokes a startling image that not only epitomizes their relationship but provides the key for our reading of the novel itself. *Clarissa's Ciphers* examines the importance of willful misinterpretation and failed communication in *Clarissa* and analyzes the way literary experience of *Clarissa* may be construed or misconstrued according to the bent of the reader.

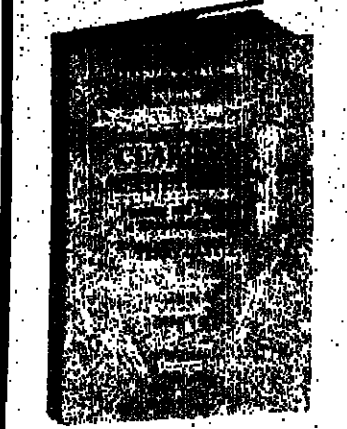
CLARISSA'S CIPHERS

Meaning and Disruption in Richardson's *Clarissa*
By TERRY CASTLE

All the letter writers in *Clarissa* are engaged in a continual process of interpretation, attempting through the letters to impose their own constructions of events on others. As Richardson's "exemplar to her sex," *Clarissa* is the paradigmatic female victim. Terry Castle delineates the ways in which, in a world where only voice carries authority, *Clarissa* is repeatedly silenced, both metaphorically and literally. The epistolary text mimics the underlying semantic struggle between Lovelace and *Clarissa* as she is reduced to the status of a physical counterpoint to the semantic violations she has already suffered. A victim of physical assault, she is first a victim of hermeneutic abuse.

Have readers' views of *Clarissa* been conditioned by the novel's internal dynamics? Drawing on feminist criticism and on recent hermeneutic theory, Castle examines the question of authority in the novel, by tracing patterns of abuse and exploitation that occur when meanings are arbitrarily and violently imposed, she explores the sexual politics of reading as it relates to the characters of the novel, and shows its implications for the novel's readers.

"There are really two books here: one (which the author counts as primary), an analysis of the difficulties of interpretive reading, especially of *Clarissa*, the other, a feminist reading of *Clarissa*. Over the years a lot of sympathy has been given to the urbane and dashing Lovelace; Castle's sound and sensitive reading helps restore the balance, she clearly defines the political implications of *Clarissa's* rape and the way the tragedy grows out of a woman's powerlessness in a patriarchal society." —Choice



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An RIP for UDI

Geoffrey Wheatcroft

DAVID CAUTE

Under the Skin: The Death of White Rhodesia
447pp. Allen Lane. £14.95.
0 7139 1357 6

Few historical episodes are as strange as the brief empire of white men in Africa. People are alive still who were alive when the Pioneer Column founded its new colony in Mashonaland and named the capital Salisbury. In 1890 the Scramble for Africa had barely begun. Little more than two generations later Africa was being unscrambled. Or, at least, the European empires which had entirely divided it up were withdrawing. For the most part this withdrawal was carried out with a semblance of good grace. But most of Africa had been colonized in no more than the formal sense of having a European administration. It was only where there were white settlers in significant numbers that a struggle for power took place. One of those countries was Rhodesia.

Federation and compromise failed in the early 1960s, Ian Smith proclaimed UDI in 1965 and there followed the tragical negotiations which nearly led to British recognition of an independent Rhodesia. The black nationalist movement, or movements, opposed Smith but could do little in practice to combat him until 1975 when with support from a newly independent Mozambique the guerrilla war began in earnest. This is where *Under the Skin* takes up the story.

In so far, that is, as a story is what it takes up. It is an odd debugging of a book, impressionistic, episodic, anecdotal. It does not pretend to give a conventional narrative of the last days of Rhodesia. That has already been done by Martin Meredith in *The Past is Another*

Country, and by other writers also. David Caute's object is to get inside the white settlers, and to describe — and applaud — the end of the country they ruled using a "historian's power of analysis... a journalist's eyewitness reporting... and a novelist's sense of detail".

But a historian, however much his sympathies may be engaged and however recently the events took place, stands back and looks at them critically; a reporter — rather than a polemical journalist — tells the story plainly and unadornedly; a novelist has a feeling for a character and speech. Caute's book fits none of these. It is a sort of *jeu d'esprit*, a mixture of fine writing and journalistic breathlessly striving for effect.

Mr Caute has been both don and dilettante. In trying to avoid the mandarin style, academic or literary, he ends up with the tone of voice of (*mutatis mutandis*, politically, of course) a *Daily Express* leader. Mr P. K. van de Byl, Ian Smith's minister of justice, is here "a rampant, pseudo-Anglicized social snob... swinishly suave... with a passion for hunting, shooting and fishing... ultra-British drawl...". Clearly Caute doesn't like "P.K." (those who do are a small group); might not a better writer have got him right without that sort of splutter?

He does not much like most white Rhodesians, which is a drawback in a writer trying to get under their collective skin. Sometimes he is exhaustingly ironic: "his wife Sally is English too and awfully nice". Sometimes there is another sort of sneer. Listening to a sermon preached against black terrorism by the Anglican Dean of Salisbury, he observes that "The cockney accent is continually surprising". There are many such turnings. Like other critics of the Rhodesian whites he seems to dislike them almost more for being common than for being racist, rampant social snobbery? Oddly enough, one person

about whom Caute is both fair and perceptive is Ian Smith himself.

Because it is a personal impression the book should not perhaps be judged by rigorous historical or journalistic standards; but the "novelist's sense" is a catch as well as a let out. Some of the large quantity of reported speech was clearly tape-recorded and rings true; not all of it. Whites in southern Africa have a rich vocabulary of racial abuse but they rarely talk about "muntis" and "kaffirs" in front of visitors, not from the *New Statesman*. In any case, Caute has a tin ear for dialogue. Even where the gist may be right he fails to capture the nuances. He makes people talk the way they are supposed to talk, not the way they actually talk.

It is not, then, the theme of the book which is wrong but its tone. Rhodesia was taken from its original inhabitants by force and fraud. Its story epitomizes the line in *Heart of Darkness*: the white man's incursion into Africa is "not a pretty picture when you look into it too closely". By the same token it is a serious story and neither the coming or the going of white Rhodesia ought to be written about with a snigger. The guerrilla war was fought with great brutality on both sides. One of the grimest episodes was the shooting down of a civilian airliner by Zipra fighters who took prisoner ten survivors and then shot them, including two girls of eleven and fourteen. For Caute, one of the survivors is "Like Rider Haggard's Allan Quatermain, beleaguered among hostile natives"; and he can't resist adding: "for the first time in the war, the blacks were culling the whites. (See also 'slot', 'take-out', 'waste' and 'drill', not to mention 'stonk' — all variations in the white lexicon for killing terms, gooks and floppies in suitably large numbers.)"

Elsewhere he describes the misgivings and anxieties of whites in the last days and then adds: "Is this the spirit of the Battle of Britain? Are these truly Churchill's children? But although he understands — all too well —

irony as a literary technique he quite misses the ironies of his story. Like so many others he falls into the obvious trap of supposing that because white supremacy is morally and in the end physically indefensible, then it will be followed by a golden age, a foredoomed hope. The rhetoric of the guerrilla movement, which Caute implicitly endorses, held that there was such a thing as a "Zimbabwean people". In fact, the black peoples of Rhodesia were united by a desire to be rid of white rule, and by nothing else.

Caute quotes a white Rhodesian as saying, "I've thought about it but I won't work for a black government. Next year I'll be out." But as Caute must know, the supreme irony is that many whites — not yet-reconstructed racists, some of them — have stayed and will stay in Zimbabwe, where there is place for them; the real problem is not conflict between black and white but between the two black peoples: the Shona getting their revenge for the long years of Ndebele supremacy before the whites arrived. The concluding words of the book were written last July: "But Nkomo's future remains uncertain and with it the stability of a united Zimbabwe."

That has proved to be nervous understatement. Today, Nkomo, the father of Zimbabwean nationalism, is in hiding and his future is not so much uncertain as precarious in the extreme. His old comrades in arms, Dumiso Dabengwa and Lookout Masuku are on trial for treason, and there seems strong likelihood that Nkomo himself will be, before long. The *New Statesman*, Mr Caute's paper, reckons that there are five thousand political prisoners in Zimbabwe. Other good sources say the government forces have recently killed more than a thousand people while pacifying Matabeleland, in the sense that Rhodes' Chartered Company pacified it ninety years ago. There is no pleasure in reciting the facts. But they make Mr Caute's "celebration" look not only premature but smugly self-indulgent.

once as *Ayur-Veda* (this is like spelling Homoeopathy as Homoeo-Pathy). The practice of embalming bodies, mentioned in Indian literature as far back as the *Ramayana*, is identified as "practice" unknown among Hindus. The term "depressed class" used in the British day to describe specified castes, not all of them untouchables (its current equivalent is "Scheduled castes and tribes"), is explained as the equivalent of "Untouchables and the very poor". It becomes a subcategory: we are not told of which caste Mrs Desai's decision not to use "such modern conveniences as a bathtub" is mentioned with some amusement: as it happens, most traditional Indians would find bathtubs in a bathtub physically disgusting, and unfamiliarity with things Indian is writ large all over this book. "English", to which the author refers with appropriate contempt, is invented a colourful expression: "Daddy-mummy culture". Literally it refers to Indians who use English instead of their own language to address their parents. The term has wider connotations: alienation from one's own society aggravated by an ignorant contempt for it. A *Family Affair* reads like a prime example of "Daddy-mummy culture". The last would come as an unpleasant surprise to anyone who has read Mehta's highly sensitive and humane evocation of an Indian childhood.

It is impossible to find anything to praise in this book by an eminent writer much of whose work, like *The New Statesman*, it will be "acclaimed" as a "credible account of Indian politics" and duly make the grade as recommended reading on American campuses. It has some entertainment value for those audiences that still retain a taste for Pakistani journalism — a genre with a formidable ancestry going back to Miss Mayo and the Anglo-Indian

cockney. *Amrit* is a

POETRY

PATRICK TAYLOR-MARTIN

John Betjeman: His Life and Work
192pp. Allen Lane. £9.95.
0 7139 1339 0

Symbolically enough, when John Betjeman, celebrant of the *John Betjeman*, published his *Collected Poems* in 1958, the British left-wing intellectual was gathered in a coffee bar. It, that is, we are to believe. A. Alvarez's "London Letter" in the *Partisan Review* for Spring 1959. With insufficiently few reservations, Alvarez reported that a new magazine, *Universities and Left Review*, showed signs of life and activity that are unusual in the London intellectual world. One of the signs is that he opened up a coffee bar. *The Partisan*, which when it was paid for itself, will gloat back its profits into the ULR. *The Partisan*, officially, is an anti-coffee-bar coffee-bar: no plants climb up your leg if you sit there more than half an hour; no stuffed parrots eye you coldly through bamboo lattice-work; there is no background music to put you off your food; the only gesture towards current Bohemian café fashion is the optional chess-sets. Instead, the place has been designed in the best air-raid shelter style; sparsely painted concrete, skeletal stairs, two levels, and a dug-out within the dug-out below for the boys.

The "innates", Alvarez observed without detectable irony, were unusually cheerful "as though they were all there to sign up for some crusade". This, then, was the critical context in which Betjeman's *Collected Poems* appeared — an heretically stateless bunker, chilly and comfortless, filled with rigorous types whose thought processes were the intellectual equivalent of cold baths, khaki shorts, bare knees and the reintroduction of rationing. No wonder that Betjeman and his crowd of 38,400 admirers were stopped at the door by Alvarez, and even less surprising, perhaps, that Betjeman should refer (in a later volume) to "journalism full of hate" and "the prods of pigs", as well as to "One-seven Alvarez Cloister". Typical, one feels, that the coffee bar would have to be an anti-coffee-bar, a monkish cell with only room for anti-heresies of a particular kind. The Betjeman sort of anti-hero ("bald and old and green" like a threadbare tennis ball, guilty of "neglect and unkemptness", "I remembered her defencelessness as I made my heart a stone", "I am thirty summers old, / Riches, wickedness and colder") was bound to be refused admission to *The Partisan*.

Betjeman was insufficiently glum, and likely to ironize that "sparsely painted concrete" or wonder why Alvarez should think it necessary to say that the chess-sets were optional. Frankly, Alvarez explained, the man just wasn't serious: "all the creative effort of Eliot, Yeats and Auden, and the painful fight to establish critical standards and a fresh tradition by men like Richards, Leavis and Empson, have apparently done no good at all." Reviewing *Summoned by Bells* in the *Observer* two years later, John Wain reiterated the charge: "It does not follow from this that Betjeman's work is foolish. It is merely that the strength and appeal of what he writes lies elsewhere, away from the kind of discriminations that must be used when 'real' poetry is in question." Ah yes, discriminations:

I'm making some changes next week in the organization
And though I admire
Your work for me, John, yet the need to
Increase circulation
Means you must retire:
An outlook more global than yours is the
qualification
I really require.

Betjeman has never had the required global outlook, so prized by his detractors. "Greek Orthodox" virtually his sole poetic excursion abroad, loses itself with absent-minded rapidity in English preoccupations as the Betjeman spots "The semblance of an English channel screen" Unlike his

critics, he has never been a globetrotter.

In fact, John Wain's absence in America, his discriminations neatly folded in his battered suitcase, was one of the reasons Alvarez cited for Betjeman's sudden popularity:

with the young men off the field, the Old Guard moved back in force. The occasion was the publication of *The Collected Poems of John Betjeman*. . . . Now, Mr Betjeman is a skillful, harmless minor writer of light verse, who is most successful when hymning *la belle nuit des riches*; he writes little panegyrics on bullying tennis girls, the nostalgia of boarding schools and the hidden charms of Victorian monstrosities. His subjects, in short, are the rather delicious trials and tribulations of being upper middle class.

And, Alvarez avuncularly concluded, "no one apart from a few mildly eccentric English dons at Oxford, had ever taken it particularly seriously". For someone so keen on discrimination and "the painful fight to establish critical standards", Alvarez's account is strangely inaccurate. A fine little grouping of others. Neither Edmund Wilson, Auden nor Philip Larkin, all of them staunch supporters of Betjeman's poetry, could be described as "mildly eccentric English dons". And one is curious to know where exactly Alvarez locates nostalgia for boarding schools. In the lines "You're to be booted. Hold him steady, chaps"; "So all the previous night I spewed with fear"; "The dread of beatings!"; "And by his fistful gas-jet nursed my fear?" Well, no. Only the first quotation appears in *Collected Poems* (1958), the others are from *Summoned by Bells*. There are 130 poems in *Collected Poems* (1958) and of them only one refers to school — a day school, as it happens. The "bullying tennis girls" are another figment of Alvarez's indolence. Betjeman may wish to be manhandled by these big girls, but what he mostly allows us to see is their complete indifference to him — by no means the same thing.

Presumably, too, it is the "fresh tradition" which prompts Alvarez's remark, "he also writes bad religious poems about death". For "religious" read "agnostic". And I find nothing religious in Betjeman's deservedly famous "Death in Leamington". On the other hand, Patrick Taylor-Martin's plodding analysis of a poem, written from an avowedly friendly standpoint, reminds one of nothing so much as a vet administering a fatal injection to an old favourite. Betjeman's superbly particular realization — the incongruous flirtation between "the evening star" and the uncompromisingly modern "plate glass window", the vivid cluster suggested by "Breast high 'mid the stands and chairs", the grim symbolism of "She covered the fire with coal", as opposed to "And then on the fire put coal", the telling finality of "She moved the table of bottles / Away from the bed to the wall" — all these touches, delicately angled at the net, go for nothing in Mr Taylor-Martin's account. Betjeman might be merely warning us. The final might be merely warning us. The final might be merely warning us.

"tiptoeing gently over the stairs" is an ace that Taylor-Martin simply does not see. For him, this lonely, ominous poem retains its "delectable freshness and sparkle". One could ransack the *OED* for months and not come up with a word less appropriate to "Death in Leamington" than delectable.

Do you know that the stucco is peeling?
Do you know that the heart will stop?
From those yellow Italianate arches
Do you hear the plaster drop?

Eliot once wrote that Rosamund Vinney, in *Middlemarch*, frightened him far more than Goneril and Regan. In the same way, this startling direct address to the reader chills me more than Eliot's "I will show you fear in a handful of dust". It is less, heretic, perhaps, but horribly indelible. Of it, Taylor-Martin, "places, action and feelings are as only so that the physical decay of the spa town images the old lady's lingering death". Correct, of course, but totally inadequate, as his later conclusion makes clear: "the poet's attitude being at one with the nurse's: clinical matter-of-factness."

At Home to everything

Craig Raine

Never mind that "tiptoeing gently". Actually, one might go back to Dunbar's "Lament for the Makers" to find a comparably awesome example of *Timor Mortis Conturbat Me*. Those unanswerable questions form a prophecy applicable to everyone, including the poet.

Taylor-Martin, however, is not really in sympathy with Betjeman and his study blunders on, uniquely deaf to tone and eager to recommend inferior poems while demoting better ones, or simply misunderstanding them. Exeter is a case in point, though Betjeman's play with tenses provides Taylor-Martin with the vestige of an excuse. Again, "what is undeniably tragic is overlaid with force" because of Betjeman's "total detachment". Taylor-Martin's reading of "Exeter" gives us a doctor's wife whose faith is restored after her husband's death in a car accident. "The neat inversion of the two stanzas describing the wife's alternate loss and recovery of her faith is too slick, a device which enables the poet to tie up the ends of his poem neatly. It is, in fact, just a skillful piece of versifying and the pleasure it gives is of the shallow sort afforded by light avowal in his preface that 'literature, let us not forget, exists to be enjoyed, not to be evaluated'." This looks strikingly similar to those painful discriminations so dear to Alvarez, and no more accurate.

"Exeter" describes a loss of faith, *tout court*. There is no recovery. Taylor-Martin has been misled by the use of the historic present in the third stanza: "The doctor jumps in his Morris car." The next stanza, which reverts to the past tense, makes this clear:

They brought him in by the big front door
And a smiling corpse was he;
On the dining-room table they laid him
out
Where the *Byzanders* used to be —
The *Trafalgar*, the *Sketch* and the *Byzander*
For the canons' wives to see.

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For the canons' wives to see.

In other words, before her husband's death and her subsequent loss of faith, the doctor's wife, with harmless snobbery, used to lay out smart magazines to impress her clerical neighbours. Now she doesn't bother. Trivial social concerns, and aesthetic pleasures ("Wulfric's altar and riddel posts"), are erased for her by mortality, as they were for Betjeman: You ask me to believe You and I only see decay.

Betjeman has always known the steep price to be paid for atheism — riddel posts, squinches, carved swags, fiddle-back vestments, baldchin pillars, brass-studded baize, incense and box-pews. To renounce these pleasures, as the doctor's wife does, is an index of death's terrible power.

Taylor-Martin is excusably wrong about the scenario of "Exeter", but inexcusably wrong about its tone. The quality of "burlesque" that he isolates results from his own imaginative failure: in Betjeman's world, the cancellation of a magazine subscription, even to *The Tatler*, can be the outward sign of a great spiritual upheaval. Betjeman understands petty snobbery from the inside and perceives the depths of its tenuous roots. In this suburban milieu, to cast off such things causes a reverberation like a diminished echo of Lear's "Off, off, you lendings" — bereft of tragic dimension, quite unpublic, un-dramatically painful and tellingly serious.

Taylor-Martin's blustering account of the problematical "Group Life: Letworth" is no happier. Where he finds an outmoded attack on "social progressiveness", with Betjeman "tilting at a target which had been toppled long before" by Orwell, I find something much more worrying and complicated. But, then, few are gifted with Taylor-Martin's trenchant prose ("a sledge hammer seems to have been used to crack a walnut"; "the agony is laid on with a trowel"; "Lord Birkenhead hit the nail on the head").

The best thing in John Betjeman: *His Life and Work* is the biographical section. There, all too briefly, we are spared Taylor-Martin's rich critical prose ("it is a spirited and accomplished poem, something of a *tour de force*, with its skillful internal rhymes, its well-managed transitions and subtle variations of mood") and released into Betjeman's hilarious and troubled life. We learn about Betjeman's fits of depression and other personal facts — that his forceful wife and he led separate lives to some extent and that his son (in an act of rebellion?) became a Mormon in Utah. With Auden and MacNeice, he writes the great erotic couplet:

Often think that I would like
To be the saddle of a bike.

In Ireland, during the war, he signs his correspondence "Sean O'betjeman" and dates all minutes according to the liturgical calendar. As a film critic, he persuades Myrna Loy to claim an interest in English Perpendicular architecture. And at the white-lie Savoy dinner to celebrate his marriage, he snaps his specially-made elastic bow-tie throughout the meal to irritate his snobbish in-laws. This ability to let rip in life is responsible, of course, for a poem like "Slog", which Taylor-Martin approaches with all the caution of a tax accountant, chiding the "intemperate and quite uncharacteristic savagery" and noting, in mitigation, that Betjeman very properly expiates the "bald young clerks". On the whole, Taylor-Martin

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is uneasy with satire: on sober reflection, it sometimes seems unfair.

It is odd, then, to note that he almost puts his finger on Betjeman's most important technique: "Part of the pleasure - though it is a very secondary one - must derive from the reader's awareness of the strangeness of the enterprise," he writes of *Summoned by Bells*. "It gives one something of a frisson to have the febrile world of Oxford in the twenties described in a form which the Victorians reserved for ponderous and moralising epics." This presentation of the modern world in the forms of a traditional poetic technique is, of course, the hallmark of all Betjeman's writing. It is indeed. All the same, Taylor-Martin finds it "secondary" and *Summoned by Bells*, Betjeman's serious comic masterpiece, is given the thumbs down. Taylor-Martin says: "For him, Betjeman's long poem 'falls short of his august models'. As, it is necessary to add, Betjeman intended.

When, in 1849, Arnold whinged to Clough that the age was "not unprofound, not ungrand, not unmoving - but unpoetical", Clough's belated reply came in 1858 with *Amours de Voyage*. There, Clough took the classical hexameter and bent it to his own, utterly modern, mock-epic purpose: "Am I prepared to lay down my life for the British female?" Betjeman uses the blank verse of his illustrious predecessors to the same end in *Summoned by Bells*. So it is absurdly beside the point to complain that the poem displays witlessness or lapses into banality. When Frank Kermode considers "Deeply I loved thee, 31 West Hill" and concludes that this "would not be a tolerable line in a local newspaper poet", Taylor-Martin finds a simple negative judgment. But Kermode fully appreciates what he happily calls Betjeman's "comic astigmatism" - the play of tone and the role of parody in Betjeman's work. When Betjeman writes:

Come, Hygieia, goddess of the growing boy,
I here salute thee in Sanctogen!

Kermode can presumably hear the subversive reminiscence of, say, Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty":

Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!
O Duty! if that name thou love...

Betjeman is plainly disowning the oracular mode and giving it; he knows he isn't the type and that life, to be honest, just isn't like that. His verse autobiography is nearer Joyce's *Bloom* than Homer's *Ulysses*:

I see the asphalt slope and smell again
The sluggish, sour, inadequate latrines.
The joy of *Summoned by Bells* is that, for all its camp poetesse, it escapes Poetry all together:

Tons, if you added them, of buttered toast
Had she and I consumed through all the days.

Once jettisoned, the blank verse line and its expectations create the rich literary comedy of "House slippers, sponge-bags, pyjamas, Common Prayer" - not to mention the Frostian vividness of "Salt and hot son on rubber water-wings". It is used to approach poetry like this in the Arnoldian spirit of false seriousness. Betjeman is not interested in the noble application of ideas to life. He is interested in the thing itself - life - and he succeeds marvellously, without recourse to the Grand Style. "And now if you will find my spectacles" - what a blank verse line. What flat-footed brio. No use frowning the brow; get out the handkerchief and dab your eyes.

You can scarcely understand Betjeman's poetry until you have grasped that he writes "badly" in order to write well. It is a brilliant device and one which has disoriented his critics. In essence, Betjeman employs a faintly dated, antique style. Timeless Classical by Golden Treasury and spikes it with ephemeral detail,

knowing that nothing dates like timelessness and that nothing lasts like dross. By and large, Betjeman's lines break every modernist rule. They might have been written, in the spirit of the contradiction, with Ezra Pound's "A Few Don'ts by An Imagiste" propped open at his elbow. It is futile, however, to set up a conflict between Betjeman and modernism, as Alvarez and Wain do, and as Betjeman's greatest admirer, Larkin, seems to do. It is possible to admire Eliot and Betjeman - but only if you can see that Pound's eminently sound rules have been broken by an exceptional poet.

If one reads Betjeman solemnly, the ironic play between, for instance, "truncheon" and the rest of the line in "May-Day Song for North Oxford" will be baffling. And a constant sound of flushing runneth from windows where / The toothbrush too is ailing in this new North Oxford air. This is funny, as much of Betjeman is in a way that does not preclude authenticity. The "poetic" is emphasized to accommodate and throw into relief the unpoetic. Or consider "Old Friends", which begins with Betjeman taking down a bolt of Laura Ashley and measuring off a foot or two:

And over the west is glowing a mackerel sky
Whose opal fleece has faded to purple pink.

Soon this standard stuff, a kind of poetic comforter, is replaced:

Where is Anne Chancel who loved this place the best,
With her tense blue eyes and her shopping bag falling apart,
And her racy gossip and nineteen-twenty zest.

And that warmth of heart?
The technique is precisely that used by Dr Johnson in his "On the Death of Dr Robert Levett", where he modulates from average elegiac ("Well tried through many a varying year, / See LEVETT to the grave descend") to accurate observation:

Yet still he fills affection's eye,
Obscurely wise, and coarsely kind...

Coarsely kind. *Tense blue eyes*. We have before us not the recipient of an elegy but a real person. The method is unorthodox, but it works. Modernist poetic decorum is flouted and replaced, then the replacement is flouted in its turn. Betjeman is a great poetic southpaw.

When Ian Hamilton reviewed *The Best of Betjeman* in 1978, he noted, comparing Larkin with Betjeman, that: "The principal difference between the two poets is that where Larkin uses metre and rhyme as a means of strengthening and elevating ordinary speech, Betjeman more often than not appears to be the creature of his metrical correctness." Accordingly, Hamilton offered to rewrite a few bits of Betjeman to eliminate inversions: "the proposition is merely that many rich, heartfelt, beautifully observed moments in his poetry get unnecessarily jaunted by his unreasoning commitment to form he's committed to." Though Hamilton is clearly sympathetic and finally rejects his own editorializing, one can detect in his reservations a commitment to poetic decorum - the sense that "lightness" and "jauntification" have no place in "real" poetry. We are, in short, back with John Wain. Or, to give him a rest, with Thom Gunn, who reviewed the *Collected Poems* in the *Yale Review* for June 1959 - an essay he has (rightly) chosen not to reprint in *The Occasions of Poetry*.

Gunn was (rightly) puzzled by Lord Birkenhead's prefatory assertion that Betjeman is not "a funny" poet. Gunn patiently noted the humour in the poetry, adding: "but Mr Betjeman wants something more; he wants to be beautiful as well as humorous, as, for example, in the following stanza":

When shall I see the Thames again?
The prom-prompted gems again,
As beily ATS

Without their hats
Come shooting through the bridge?
And 'cheerion' and 'cheer-bye'
Across the waste of waters die,
And low the mists of evening lie
And lightly skims the bridge.

"The reference to the ATS", Gunn continues, "is quite amusing, though far from original, but it is a complete variance to the previous two stanzas, to the poetic reference to gems of light in the water, and to the equally serious lines that follow. The mixture makes me uneasy. I know that funny-looking people are to be seen in beautiful scenes, but Mr Betjeman has merely noted the discrepancy (with a shudder of repugnance) and the fact itself is not particularly interesting." Where Ian Hamilton might find jauntiness in the "beily ATS", Gunn discovers a "shudder of repugnance". Surely both are mistaken? Betjeman has a more elastic sense of beauty and joy than either - one which includes the low mists of evening and the ATS, evocatively free of their regulation headgear. Decorum must learn to bed down with the truth of Betjeman's emotional response.

The problem is both modernist and perennial: Wordsworth faced it when he wished to write about an idiot boy, Eliot when he wrote of "cigarettes in corridors / And cocktail smells in the bars". The anonymous TLS reviewer commented drily: "the fact that these things occurred to the mind of Mr Eliot is surely of the very smallest importance to any one - even to himself. They certainly have no relation to 'poetry', and we only give an example because some of the pieces, he states, have appeared in a periodical which claims that word as its title." Of "The Idiot Boy", Coleridge complained: "the author has not, in the poem itself, taken sufficient care to preclude from the reader's fancy the disgusting images of ordinary morbid filth, which yet it was by no means his intention to represent." Baudelaire, in his review of the *Salon* of 1845, encapsulated the problem: "We are painting, the true painter for whom we

are looking, will be he who can snatch its epic quality from the life of today and can make us see and understand, with brush or with pencil, how great and poetic we are in our cravats and patent-leather boots." The epic, on the whole, is not Betjeman's aim. A more modest truth will do, but modern life is what he sets out to capture:

Miles of pram in the wind and Pam in the
gorse track,
Coco-nut smell of the broom, and a
packet of Weights

Press'd in the sand...
That packet of Player's Weights stands for much that is conventionally unpoetic in Betjeman's work: "The Lynams' cess-pool like a body blow", "Lock'd is the Elsan in its brick vaultment", "Do six balls make an over? Help me, God!", "Striving on to prunes and suet", "Fleas round the tamarisk, an early cigarette", "Home and Colonial, Star, International", "Oh, Fuller's angel-cake, Robertson's marmalade", "And Heinz's ketchup on the tablecloth". So much that is personal, universal and true finds its way into Betjeman's poetry - which is At Home to everything.

And how is it done? Take "Parliament Hill Fields":

Up the hill where stucco houses in Virginia
Creepers drown
And my childish wave of pity, seeing
children carrying down
Sheaves of drooping dandelions to the
courts of Kentish Town.

Everyone has seen something similar, just as we've seen the "ginger-beery surf", or "one child [who] still zig-zags homewards up the lane" - but Betjeman makes poetry of it by evaluating his pity as "childish", by specifying the flowers and by playing on the romantic Golden Treasury associations of "courts", while insisting on the ironic urban reality.

Auden and Larkin recognize in Betjeman's poetry a vision of England which they share. In "Margate, 1940", Betjeman ponders what "we are fighting for". His answer is one that the

Larkin of "Show Saturday" might have provided:

Oh! then what a pleasure to see the ground
With tables for two laid as tables for four,
And bottles of sauce and Kie-Ora and
Awaiting their owners who'd gone up to
wash.

Betjeman may not like this world of Wilfred Pickles's *Have-a-Go*, any more than Larkin likes the "cut-price crowd", but both love it. As Auden did, even in America, where he wrote in *The Age of Anxiety* of "country curates in cold bedrooms". In 1947, a selection from Betjeman, Auden professed to believe that Betjeman had been taken over by the spirit of his favourite Aunt Daisy: "how else could he have entered so intimately into my childhood? How else could he be so home with the provincial spall terms, the seaside lodgings, the bicycles, the harmonium, above all, the atmosphere of ritualistic controversy? And, one might add, so at home with Auden's sense of quotidian evil, as we find it in Betjeman's

The milkman on the road about starting
The playground nettles nodded 'Now begin -

And Evil waited, quivering, for sin.
As for the seaside lodgings, of course, "ten minutes from the shore, / Still unprepared to make a picnic lunch / Except by notice on the previous day." A quotation from boarding-house regulations and a quotation from every English life. We all have an Aunt Daisy and a childhood littered with bread-names and guilt.

Larkin has also written an introduction to Betjeman for American readers. It would be interesting to know whether this extraordinarily English poet travels well, or if, as suspect, that wonderfully clear and artful arrives in New York looking muddy and tasting strange. After all, what are Americans to make of a writer who, in his essay "Topographical Verse", had this to say about Hardy's poem "At the Draper's"? "We all know that and little Satire of Circumstance about the wife ordering mourning before her husband was dead. But it is the atmosphere created by Hardy which makes the poem memorable for me. 'At the Draper's'. What a title! I can see the shop he stood at the back of - called Cavendish House, smell of calico, wires going to a cash desk with corks whizzing among the incandescent lights and the Congressional minister's wife being served at the next counter." Brilliant, but not for export.

As a thirteen-year-old attending an obscure Northern public school, my first encounter with poetry was "At the Draper's Love Song". It meant less than nothing to me. The House Counties might have been another continent. So this was poetry, I thought - being beaten at at tennis by a girl, I turned up the collar of my gaudy tie and headed for the nearest coffee bar. However, I never forgot Miss Joan Hunter Dunn. It takes time to grow up to Betjeman. America may manage it yet. But there's probably no hope for Alvarez. Was there ever?



"Three Studies of a Man reading a Newspaper", a black chalk drawing by Adolf Friedrich Erdmann von Menzel, 1891, to be offered in Christie's sale of Continental drawings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries at 8 King Street, St James's, London SW1, on March 17.

Replay of a revival

Isabel Colegate

WILLIAM LOWNDEN

The Theatre Royal at Bath
91pp. Bristol: Redcliffe Press. £5.95.
0 905459 49 0

The Theatre Royal at Bath reopened last November with a National Theatre production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The same play was given at an earlier reopening, in March 1863, when the theatre had been rebuilt after a fire had destroyed the interior. On that occasion the producer was Charles Kean, the play was preceded by as many as nine dramatic prologues as well as the overture to *William Tell* and followed by a "new and laughable farce" called *Marriage At Any Price*. Theatrical tastes have varied over the years. The same play was given at the theatre was opened in Bath in 1705, and William Lowndes's book shows how Bath kept pace with fashion. The great days of Mrs Siddons's first triumphs were followed by the early nineteenth-century passion for juveniles, when the fifteen-year-old Master William Batey attracted

hysterical crowds; by the popular performances of Mrs Dorothy Jordan, who bore ten children to the Duke of Clarence before he became William IV and was said by Hazlitt to be "the child of nature, whose voice was a cordial to the heart"; and by Macready, Edmund Kean and the famous clown Joseph Grimaldi, who appeared in *Mother Goose* in 1815.

By the mid-nineteenth century theatre in Britain generally was at a low ebb, and Bath itself had ceased to be fashionable. A series of managers failed to halt the decline, and the fire in 1862 seemed the final blow; but a limited company was formed, the money was raised with the help of local committees, and the theatre reopened less than a year after the fire. The restoration retained the essentially Georgian character of the original building, using the walls that remained, including the fine George Dance facade on the Beaufort Square side. At that 1863 performance Titania was played by the sixteen-year-old Ellen Terry. She performed in Bath on several subsequent occasions, as did Irving, Sarah Bernhardt, Pavlova and Mrs Patrick Campbell; but then decline set in once more and for many

years it seemed only to be possible to make ends meet on the strength of the yearly pantomime.

In 1979 a new effort to revive the Theatre Royal's fortunes began. Two non-profit-making Trusts were set up, one to secure the building programme and to deal with the long-term financing of the theatre, and one to administer it. The National Theatre agreed to make Bath a provincial base for some of its mid-size-scale productions. The theatre reopened on the promised date, the interior rebuilding is now complete, and the exterior work, including the restoration of the Dance facade, well under way; bookings are reported to be good. All seems set fair, though the appeal for funds is still £400,000 short of the target and it remains to be seen whether Bath audiences will re-establish the claim made when the plans for the new Orchard Square theatre were announced in 1747. But it was said then, was a "Place, during its Seasons, honoured with so great a number of Persons, eminent by Politeness, Judgement and Taste, and where might reasonably be expected (next to London) the best Theatre in England".

Dandyishly dallying

John Stokes

NEO SHERRIN
A Small Thing - Like an Earthquake
288pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£10.95.
0 297 78211 8

Neo Sherrin's facade combines the glazed orientalism of the late Noel Coward with the relaxed authority of a prelate - imperturbable if slightly hunched. The suits aspire to the dinner jacket, while stiff Jeremy Street collars imply the right to primord. An American critic, commenting on Sherrin's notes as chairman of the New York version of *Quiz of the Week*, observed that he performs "not only as host and quiz-master but as our image of the British schoolmaster". We British, more accustomed to being scolded, can identify a rarer characteristic: the instinctive poise of the dandy.

A Small Thing - Like an Earthquake is, in all respects, a dandyish kind of book. Read its chapters in the order presented and you start with a montage of headlines from the year 1960, a television technique established by the *Tenby* programme from which Sherrin emerged. You conclude with a brief glimpse of his author's venerable mother gazing at her son on a television screen and commenting, "I know that man" - a vagueness no doubt echoed by many of the audience at large.

Ignore, however, Sherrin's prefatory disclaimer that the final chapter, which describes his family, is for "only the really curious and conscientious"; read it first, and the book will begin, as English autobiographies sometimes do, with rural origins, eccentric father, and formative years at a minor public school. Now the finale will be the penultimate chapter and another modestly presented moment: a command performance reception at which the author receives rather less of the royal favour than the late Bill Haley.

Sherrin's modesty is as unneurotic as it is implausible. If he disappears

between the folds of his book, it's because his natural role is the Cheshire Cat, and the mannered structure a mere variation on the show-business memoir. The absence of visible spite is also true to form. As a performer, Sherrin opts for shafts of Beerbohm rather than open Vaughn. Absences are, in any case, relative. David Frost, for example, is mostly refracted through the pages of Will Frischauer's absurd hagiography. Those not in the know will continue to find it bewildering that Frost, whose only certain mystery is that he has none, should still appear mysterious to those who have known him well.

Another absence is genuinely sad, and no fault of the author's. When this book was being written, Caryl Brahms, Sherrin's friend and collaborator for twenty-eight years, was writing her own autobiography, which probably explains why she does not appear more prominently here. The partnership was unrelentingly prolific: from the stage version of *No Bed for Bacon* (born in Bristol, raised in Croydon, laid to rest in Golders Green without so much as a glimpse of Shaftesbury Avenue), through *Cindy-Ella* (a possible forerunner of *The Wiz*) and the television satire shows of the 1960s, to the rather regrettable *Miford Girls* of 1981. A true aficionado, with the rare talent of persuading others that her own enthusiasms were worth sharing, Miss Brahms, who died last year, now deserves more elaborate commemoration.

Aficionado, incidentally, is very much a Sherrin word. It covers his fondness for ancient actresses, for cleaning ladies with a philosophical bent, for maestro comos whose talents sometimes fail them. The problem with Sherrin's "distire" is that it has always been of a distinctly aficionado kind. It shows in his appreciation of Harold Macmillan, and in his delight at the BBC codes that his own programmes famously transgressed. Loving the thing he laughs at, Sherrin may be disqualified, by temperament alone, from the satirist's necessary misanthropy. It's more than a sign of modesty, then, that in the middle of his analysis of the satire boom of the 1960s

Sherrin should insert a cautionary quotation from Gilbert Highet, who argues that satire must confine itself to "follies" and keep its viewers and readers "gazing and gasping". Given that Sherrin's programmes have always started late, there's appropriateness in his endorsement of the belief that satire merely keeps us awake.

But the favoured technique of jumbled headlines (perfected in Millicent Martin's opening lyrics for *That Was The Week*, revived for the first chapter of this book) may be a sign of even more limited aims. Because the items have been pre-selected by the newspapers, the effect of the satiric juxtaposition is again self-effacing, as if media forces were engaged in some private game of mutual mockery. The daring commentator dissolves to a cocked eyebrow, the viewer or reader abandoned to sort the wit from the charm.

Left to his own devices in the late 1960s, Sherrin turned his attentions to the English film industry, offering a brief kiss of life to a patient who managed a few ribald gestures in *The Virgin Soldiers*, *The National Health* and spin-offs from *Up Pompeii*. Reverting to savagery, he masterminded *Side by Side with Sandheim*, a success well deserved and still basked in. Now, disasters can "come back like old friends", together with the shows that got away: an impressively modest but ungrudging list ending poignantly with a screenplay for *Peter Pan* and an adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Sherrin's programmes may start too late and go on for too long; it's their habit of being dropped that makes them so attractive. *That Was The Week* died by establishment fiat, the New York version of *Quiz of the Week* founded because its topicality made it an unsuitable candidate for repeats in middle America. Visible men are easily dated, and so it may be fortunate for Sherrin's becoming modesty that he should, as he claims, have lost his file of press cuttings. It is equally fortunate for his readers that he has hung on to his joke book. Unlike the outspoken television programmes, Sherrin's insider's anecdotes do bear repetition. They are often very funny indeed.

Spectatorially speaking

Hilary Spurling

AMABEL WILLIAMS-ELLIS
All Strachays are Cousins: Memoirs
288pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£11.95.
0 297 78208 8

All Strachays are cousins but some are more celebrated than others. Amabel Williams-Ellis was born in 1894, daughter of the editor and proprietor of the *Spectator*, St Lo Strachey, in whose hands the paper sold nearly three times as many copies as any of its rivals and acquired an influence undreamed of even in television today. "In general, my impression as a child was that if you happened to go to the United States of America, you would naturally visit the President, or in Egypt the Residency... also that grown-up men - not women of course - were usually MPs and in the Cabinet."

This favoured infant heard her just *So Stories* from Rudyard Kipling himself, played chess with the Croomer, commonly sat down to table with Arthur Balfour, Rufus Isaacs or Andrew Carnegie, and didn't care a bean for any of them. She grew up in what has long since come to seem a fantasy world of muffled men and the first homeless carriages at a time when no also girl ever wore make-up, walked alone or took off her hat anywhere except in her own home. Gentlemen were just going out of frock coats, only the middle-aged and part their hair in the middle, and altogether making a splash was a very great deal easier then than it is today. "It was a bold and Bohemian man who wore a felt hat in London, unless he was a painter or a writer," once said Henry James in such a hat.

If Henry James in a soft hat seemed the height of unconventionality to the young Amabel, no wonder her family never felt entirely happy about their ill-conditioned, disaffected and highly peculiar cousins - "the Lancaster Gate Strachays" - who cordially returned their suspicions. "The younger members of our family" (wrote James Strachey, meaning presumably his brother Lytton, a sister or two and himself) "applied the term 'Spectatorial' to any particularly pompous and respectable person." A faint aura still clings in these pages even to the tearaway, John Strachey, whose conversion to communism in the 1930s ruined his chances of inheriting his father's editorial seat, but who none the less seemed to his sister to be following thoroughly respectable precedents, talking "like a young St Paul" and heading for "a career... second only to the younger Pitt". Though she loyally followed his example, she herself admits that she never entirely lost the oligarch's serene and insalubrious sense of privilege, writing at times as though it made no great odds to have swapped one set of fashionable orthodoxies for another, moving on from prime ministers, consular general and viceroys via Tom Mosley and Stafford Cripps to Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre.

"You must never let a man be bored," my grandmother said to me" (was this the grandmother who as a child had watched her dog step out of the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens and shake itself hard all over another little girl who grew up to be Queen Victoria?). "Talk to him, talk about a leg of mutton if you can't think of anything better." It was a cardinal point of Edwardian etiquette - and Lady Williams-Ellis still tends, as a man, to treat the reader like a man. Her memoirs have the charm, ease and fluency of the best small talk: imperturbable, impeccably and evenly flowing, respectfully and evenly, over two world wars, unemployment and social change.

All I Did Was This: *Chapters of Autobiography* by Younger Carter, edited by Judy Komlosky and with a postscript by J. E. Morpurgo, has been published in a limited edition of 400 by The Sexton Press. Copies are available from the publisher, by post only, at Tavistock Road, London W11 1AT at £9.50. Apart from the author's own reminiscences and drawings there are two pieces by his wife, the late Marjorie Allingham, about their life in Tolleshunt D'Aray in Essex.

Facing North

'The North begins inside' (Louis MacNeice)

God knows why of all rooms I'd choose
the dark one facing North for me to write,
liking as I do air, light and views,
though there's a air in the North Wind that rocks the light
I have to keep on, all year round, all day;
nor why, despite a climate I profess to hate,
and years spent overseas, I stay,
and, when I start to pack, procrastinate.

The North Wind's part of it and when it blows my shutters rattle and the front door slams like memory shutting out half what it knows. Here I poured huge passion into aerograms, the lightest paper loaded with new hope that made the old pain seem, on looking back, seen through the wrong end of the telescope making it so small I soon lost track.

The window's open to the winter's chill, to air, to breezes and strong gusts that blow my paper lantern nothing will keep still and let me make things happen in its O. When the circle, where my hand moves over white with red and green advances on black ink, first swung like this it gave me such a fright I felt I was on a ship about to sink.

Now years of struggle make me concentrate when it throws up images of planets hurled, still glowing, off their courses, and a state where there's no gravity to hold the world. I have to hold on when I think such things and weather out these feelings so that when the wind drops and the light no longer swings I can focus on an Earth that still has men,

in this flooded orchestra where elbow grease, deep thought, long practice and much sweat gave me some inkling of an inner peace I'd never found with women till I met the one I wrote all those air letters for and she's the one I'm needing as I see the North Wind once more strip my sycamore and whip the last leaves off my elder tree.

Now when the wind flays my wild garden of its green and blows, whistling through the flues, its old reminder of the two cold poles all places are between, though where she lives the climate's a lot kinder, and starts the lightbulb swinging to and fro, and keeps it swinging, switched off, back and forth, I feel the writing room I'm leaving grow dark, and then darker with the whole view North.

Tony Harrison

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commentary

Nuclear devices

Ronald Hayman

JOHN RETALLACK
Berlin, Berlin
Donmar Warehouse

John Retallack should either have drunk deeper or tasted not the Pierian spring of *The Man without Qualities*. Robert Musil is not given a credit in the programme of *Berlin, Berlin*, though he is mentioned in the history of the Actors' Touring Company in small print on the back page. Names, themes and ideas have been transposed to contemporary Berlin from Musil's simulacrum of the chaotic Austro-Hungarian Empire in its last years. This is not a bad idea, and Retallack has a strong feeling for the way that the manic ingredients of personality quickly become overheated in Berlin, but he writes less skilfully and less carefully than he directs. He must know that there are no national daily papers in Germany, and he should have guessed - if he did not know - that what is today called Adenauerplatz did not acquire the name until Adenauer had proved he was not immortal. In *Berlin, Berlin* the counterpart to Musil's Agathe, the sister who appears not to be wholly averse to the idea of incest, is a girl called Anna, who tells us that she has just arrived from East Berlin, where she has been living. But her blouse, her make-up and her coiffure contradict her.

These are small points, but generally the script, the lyrics and the acting are not good enough to convey the main point Retallack is trying to take over from Musil. Even in his early novel *Young Werther* the hero sometimes 'sees with the eyes of reason', but often he is aware of an obscure, almost autonomous life in his mind, something he cannot 'measure out with thoughts'. In *Berlin, Berlin* the central character, Ulrich, gives up his job, not in order to feel (as Musil's Ulrich feels) 'like a stride that could be taken in any direction', but in order to close or at least narrow the gap between public events and private life. He spends his time reading 'all the national dailies', and, as the story develops, it becomes hard for him to see with the eyes of reason. But it is difficult for the author-director to find theatrical correlates for what it is that Ulrich cannot measure out with thoughts. An argument about nuclear disarmament climaxes in his shooting at the other characters with an

imaginary machine-gun. After he has messed up his chances of coaxing his attractive sister to abandon her economics-lecturer husband and her lover in favour of an incestuous ménage à deux, the final sequence shows Ulrich threatening to explode a nuclear device in Berlin, and the closing tableau centres on the inadequate actor's face, frozen into an open-mouthed grimace, expressive of dementia.

Nevertheless, John Retallack is a talent to be reckoned with. He can insinuate meaning into silence and he is ingenious in his exploitation of a simple scenic device consisting of Venetian blinds in screen-sized metal frames. Another sign of talent is the extraordinary width of the gaps between the best moments of the production and the worst. An argument in a café comes excitingly to life when Dr Kortner, a Berlin-born American, representative of an opulent foundation, first refuses to sign an anti-nuclear petition and then, having provoked a girl into hysteria, agrees. In another good sequence, the murderer Moosbrugger watches through a peep-hole while a stripper undulates at him provocatively. The extra 'e' in the middle of the name is a tiny but tiresome example of the endemic carelessness.

By far the best performance comes from Chris Barnes as the murderer. He is forceful, sullen, convincing and always eminently watchable. Asking to be arrested, he thrusts out his wrists as if every citizen of Berlin can be expected to carry around a pair of handcuffs. But in loading Moosbrugger with contemporary relevance, Retallack has trivialized Musil's conception. 'If mankind could dream collectively,' Musil wrote in the novel, 'it would dream Moosbrugger.' His Moosbrugger, a rapist-murderer, plausibly comes to play an important role in the fantasies of sophisticated, intelligent and fashionable characters who have never met him. Retallack's Moosbrugger is a less resonant figure who kills in a one-man campaign to eliminate filth from the city.

Some of the points emerge quite subtly, as when Mia (Valerie Braddell) reveals with little more than a smile that her sexual interest in the visiting American is motivated primarily by hopes of manipulating him into directing dollars towards a clinic for immigrant workers. For a small company with small resources, the enterprise is extremely ambitious, and instead of collapsing into a disaster, the show provides an interesting evening.

The wilder shores of philately

Harold Hobson

MICHAEL WILCOX

Lent
Lyric Studio, Hammersmith

The action of Michael Wilcox's *Lent* all takes place inside a school, and we are more or less officially told that the story is about a boy struggling successfully to defeat the lethal stupidity of his elders who are too old to learn better. If that really is the story, then Wilcox has told crookedly what is not worth telling at all. It is a story that has been repeated over and over again, in the theatre and out of it, over since Rupert Brooke undertook to make a better world by turning his Cambridge mentors into active Socialists. Seventy years later a theatre audience feels that it has a right to something newer than what was already *viewed* in 1914. Happily, Wilcox does have something new: Mrs Blake, the owner of the school, and by far the oldest character in the play, is, in enterprise, quickness and devastation of action, way ahead of anybody else on the stage. Patience Collier plays Mrs Blake as a charming, witty, flower-loving old lady of great charm, lethal, but with sound good sense and absolute ruthlessness. It is no wonder that she is introduced to the strains of Handel's 'Arrival of the

Queen of Sheba', for she is rich and mentally gorgeous.

Her grandson Paul Blake (Jonathan Kent) is neither though one day he will become the school's owner, when-will betide the tyrannical headmaster, Mr Edwards (Dennis Edwards) and his would-be murderous wife (Joan Anderson), and also, I should imagine, the school itself. Paul may have ideas about social reform but he has no brains. He glances with his hands in his pockets; he gives little screams and jerks of ecstasy; he is unceasingly curious about what goes on in tales about sex; he reads books much too young for him; and the speed and dexterity of his animal-like movements are an acute embarrassment. Yet they are the very heart of the play, as Mr Wilcox reveals with stunning skill when Paul is found upon the stage to the sound of Handel's *Water Music*. Paul is not truly a boy at all: he is something that has come out of Saki, spiritually a creature of nature, of the waste of misty trees, superbly designed by John Otto, that can be seen through the school window. Mr Edwards, stupid man though he is, has perceived something of this that Wensley Pithey's kindly master has overlooked. For he has taken away the boy's book of Colonial stamps so that his imagination may not be allowed to wander; but Mrs Blake, with an air of spring-like freshness, mystically sanctifies Paul's affinity with nature by taking him out to admire the crocuses.

Pot Belly's posterity

John Ray

The Cleopatras
BBC TV

It was obvious after the pre-emptive strike of *The Borgias* that the BBC would soon launch a final assault. The battlefield was thoughtfully chosen: first-century Alexandria, home of the ramshackle and horrid dynasty of the Ptolemies. One might have expected a straight march across the terrain, with strategy based on P. M. Fraser's *Ptolemaic Alexandria* or Edwin Bevan's *History*, or possibly Michael Grant's *Cleopatra*; but no. 'Don't tell us about history; get on with the story', says a girlish Cleopatra VII to her tutor, in a preliminary framing scene to one of the episodes.

She may well have a point, but the scriptwriters had chosen to make things difficult for themselves. The first six episodes are interesting. This series begins with the seventh. The idea must have been to do an *I, Claudius* based on characters that nobody had ever heard of. Richard Griffiths as Ptolemy VIII, who will evermore be known by the name of Pot Belly given him here, leaves his way through the first three episodes, amiably playing a pervert and mass-murderer who rescues the occasional line with a kind of adonoidal wistfulness ('I burnt down a school', he says during a riot. 'What's so wrong with that?' chips in a courtier. 'I left the people in it.' And so on.) In comes a scene of child-dismembering, courtesy of Justin, and we are invited to imagine the Jewish population of Alexandria, trapped, traded, sold, by elephants in the market place. This incident also appears in 3 Maccabees, where the king is Ptolemy IV, but these elephant stories do go the rounds. Ptolemy VIII, the 'Benefactor', probably was awful (a truth not incompatible with the fact that he was a brilliant administrator); J. P. Mahaffy, in his *History* (1898), makes a gentlemanly attempt to whitewash Pot Belly, but the sober Bevan, rewriting the period in the light of the papyrus, reminds us that the morality of Alexandria was not that of twentieth-century London or Oxford, or even Dublin (Mahaffy had been a tutor of Oscar Wilde). So hideous let him be.

There are other redeeming performances: Ian McNeice as Ptolemy X attempts the task of portraying a nonentity without boring

the viewer, and succeeds. But does he really have to do a sand-dance? Berenice IV (Shelagh MacLeod), in a supporting role, captures a combination of torridness and vulnerability which could have made the series interesting. Julius Caesar (Robert Hardy) is brought in to make sure that only soft drinks are served after 10.30, but stays to look like a bemused uncle as the pot is handed round. Cleopatra spends most of her time giggling with her maid-servant, Charmian and Yvonne. The script, failing to be so bad-it-was-good, slips between all the available stools.

For their own persons, it begins an odd parody. True, nectar is reached with enviable efficiency. The costumes and décor come over as a kind of flatulent evenness, a thousand years out of date even if they had ever existed. Prince Eupator, dressed up like a vignette out of the Valley of the Queens, assures us that 'I fed a little odd'. Each episode is the subject of an anatomical *idée fixe* which leaves one wondering what the next week is going to unfold. It is as if *The British in India* showed us Curzon dressed up as Gandhi, with the whole thing shot in ethnic restaurant. Greek art may be out of fashion, but it is worth considering when it comes to the Ptolemies. In reality, the various Macedonian courts looked well enough, with wide-brimmed hats, soldiers' cloaks, coloured according to rank, and high laced boots. The floors may well have been covered with Nilotic mosaics, with the Egyptian influence merely an evocative backdrop. Here, a group of Tanagra sent as a birthday present; Tanagra are figurines of Greek women; often of inexpressible charm. What we see are sub-Pharaonic jelly babies, somewhat resembling diseased abalones. Several of the rulers are bald, although whether because they take their duties as supreme pontiffs of the native religion seriously, or as nature's comment on generations of incest, is never made clear. Caesar, perversely enough, is doing rather well in the last department.

Quicquid delatrat reges plebsque Archiv: when it comes to insane rulers, the Greeks know how to make the viewers suffer. The real Ptolemy, from the late 1620s, lived the life of a wandering *émigré* artist. He was in London, Strasbourg and Frankfurt; he travelled the Rhine, and settled in Cologne for a year; in 1634 he was in Holland. Everywhere he went he drew, producing the first of the remarkable series of topographical sketches which was to continue throughout his life. In apparently miscellaneous compositions such as the early series of etched scenes in and around Strasbourg illustrating the scene of the Four Seasons, artistic effect seems subordinated in the interest of accuracy: there is no hint of baroque rhetoric, the forms are simplified, and light is even, the mood tranquil, and

A book has been produced to accompany the series, *The Cleopatras* by Philip Mackie. Publications. £1.95 0 363 200 77 4.

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commentary

The seasons of the past

Malcolm Rogers

Wenceslaus Hollar: Prints and Drawings
British Museum

The Bohemian artist Wenceslaus Hollar has always and rightly been considered an honorary Englishman. He spent over thirty highly productive years in this country, and the drawings and etchings from this period constitute a uniquely important record of English life in the mid-seventeenth century. St Francis Seymour Haden, an accomplished etcher of a later generation, characterized Hollar's work with the phrase 'truth without sentiment', adding 'People sometimes say to me, "What is it you see in Hollar?", and I always answer, "Not quite but nearly everything".'

The exhibition of Hollar's work which has recently opened at the British Museum and which continues until May 15 goes a long way to justifying this old-fashioned compliment. It is a happy product of the Anglo-Czech cultural agreement, and has been organized jointly by the British Museum and the National Gallery in Prague. It centres on two groups of twenty-one drawings from each collection, supplemented in London by a large group of prints (in speech impressions) from the Museum's collection. After its London showing, the exhibition will travel to Hague (where Hollar was born in 1607), and there an equally fine group of prints from the Czech National Gallery will be substituted.

Hollar was born into a prosperous immigrant family, but his early life as an artist was far from comfortable. His father, Registrar of the Law Court of Bohemia, evidently frowned on his son's artistic leanings, and the inscription under Hollar's etched self-portrait of 1649 shows that an early tradition still stung in later life: he proudly notes that he was 'beaucoup studé par son père'. It was more important for his development that the sophisticated culture of Protestant Bohemia was an early victim of the Thirty Years' War, and for some years from the late 1620s Hollar lived the life of a wandering *émigré* artist. He was in London, Strasbourg and Frankfurt; he travelled the Rhine, and settled in Cologne for a year; in 1634 he was in Holland. Everywhere he went he drew, producing the first of the remarkable series of topographical sketches which was to continue throughout his life. In apparently miscellaneous compositions such as the early series of etched scenes in and around Strasbourg illustrating the scene of the Four Seasons, artistic effect seems subordinated in the interest of accuracy: there is no hint of baroque rhetoric, the forms are simplified, and light is even, the mood tranquil, and

the tiny figures which people the views are not notably expressive; yet the very inconsequential nature of their actions communicates a feeling of the fragility of human life - a mood which pervades much of Hollar's best work.

In Cologne in 1636 his career took a decisive turn, for here Hollar met that legendary patron and collector, Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel (whose lavish patronage of Van Dyck is currently illustrated at the National Portrait Gallery). Arundel immediately recognized his potential, and brought him to London as part of his artistic impedimenta. Here Hollar was to remain, apart from eight years in Antwerp during the Interregnum, until the end of his life.

In London Hollar worked indefatigably, and the range and sheer quantity of his productions - amply demonstrated in the exhibition - anticipate those of a modern commercial photographer. There are book-illustrations, fashion-plates, contemporary portraits, copies of Old Master paintings and drawings, studies of ships, sculpture and coins, and a host

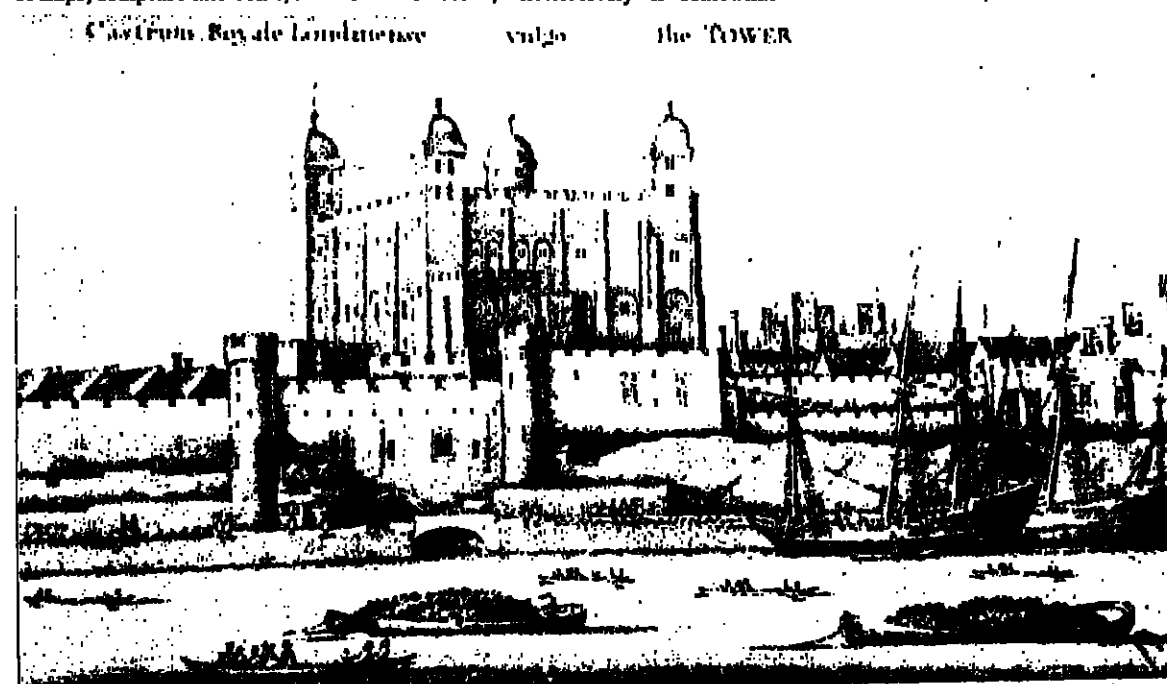
of views, of which those of London before the Great Fire and of Arundel's idyllic country seat at Albury are the most evocative. At the same time he was producing *rapportage* of contemporary events - the 'Execution of the Earl of Strafford' is the best-known example - and a remarkable series of still-lives which are his most original contribution to print-making in England. They include the exquisite series of insects, shells, and, above all, muffs, all arranged with the utmost assurance on the sheet, and rendered in striking contrast with the stylized rendition of leaves, water and masonry in the topographical prints. The compilers use the word 'fetishistic' in connection with the etchings of muffs (there is also a wonderfully velvety drawing of a muff on display), and certainly fur-lovers should not miss the exhibition, but I prefer to see them as carefully cast off by one of the ladies in a fashion plate, and as a reminder of the evanescence of beauty.

The exhibits have been carefully selected, meticulously if somewhat

drily captioned for the non-specialist, and are displayed with the customary elegance and economy of the Department of Prints and Drawings. The accompanying catalogue (by Antony Griffiths and Gabriela Kesnerová. 88pp. British Museum Publications. £3.95. 0 7141 0787 5) provides an attractive introduction to Hollar's life and work, though a less spacious design would have allowed the illustration of more exhibits.

The exhibition follows on the publication of Richard Pennington's *Descriptive Catalogue of the Etched Work 1454pp*. Cambridge University Press. £80. 0 221 22408 X. Nothing could be worthier than this scholarly up-dating of Parthey's German catalogue of 1853, but apart from the obligatory frontispiece of the artist, not one of the nearly 3,000 items listed is reproduced.

Postage-stamp illustrations could not do justice to Hollar's artistry, but they would have provided ample evidence of his fertility, and given an entrée into one of the richest visual resources of the seventeenth century.



'The Tower of London' (1647), one of Wenceslaus Hollar's etchings included in the exhibition reviewed here.

The electric egotist

Peter Kemp

Edmund Kean
Channel 4

Edmund Kean struck his contemporaries as a highly charged phenomenon. Hazlitt, dazzled by his 'bursts of energy', marvelled at the 'electrical shocks' that darted through the audience, illuminating crackling with force. Kean galvanized to life lines long embalmed beneath the marmoreal attitudinizing of the classical acting tradition. What fed his flickering, fiery performances, it seems, was energy generated by an intense core of egotism. Eager to stand out from the crowd, he took steps to ensure that he did so: no actor was allowed in front of him onstage or - unless beckoned - within ten feet of him off it; supporting roles, Kean felt, were always better pruned.

He'd have been very envious, therefore, of the scope Raymond Fitzsimons' *Edmund Kean* gave to Ben Kingsley. A one-man show, this offered an opportunity - which Kingsley seized triumphantly - for a virtuoso display of versatility. Set in the actor's dressing room, the play interspersed reminiscences about Kean's career with extracts from his calculated restlessness round property baskets, dangling costumes, towels and grease-paint. Kingsley - eyes blazing under a Byronic wig - was vividly convincing as the actor said to have 'St Anthony's fire' in his veins. St Vitus's dance in his limbs, Kean's life was

dramatic in more senses than one; and Kingsley revelled intelligently in his bravura extravaganza of it all - the spectacular leap from starvation to stardom, from grubbing for turnips in fields to swaggering over guinea-strewn floors. Drunk with applause and tipsy with brandy, he bragged about his theatrical renown and sexual notoriety, his hectic life of plaudits and the clap.

The self-engrossed and self-punishing urgency of Kean's commitment to his 'destiny' - his heroes were Byron and Bonaparte - was conveyed comically, movingly and disturbingly. His acting style was also re-staged. He began, the play pointed out, as a younger playing imp and monkeys in the Drury Lane pantomimes. Later he became a celebrated Harlequin. Going through mime routines in a lozenge jacket and black skull cap, Kingsley gave a brisk reminder of what this entailed. And his renderings of Kean performing Shakespeare - the sense pointed up by rapid, telling arm-movements (the 'pantomimic' features Hazlitt noted in the actor) - suggested this early training had lasting effects.

Kean finally shed the motley in 1814, when he appeared at Drury Lane, as Glyndwr, a role he played in a black wig and heard instead of the red ones of a stage convention. Hazlitt was there to register the advent of something remarkable - 'the first gleam of genius breaking through the gloom of the greasy-pail'. Kingsley - eyes blazing under a Byronic wig - was vividly convincing as the actor said to have 'St Anthony's fire' in his veins. St Vitus's dance in his limbs, Kean's life was

approaching the spectre of his father, not with his sword held protectively before him, but threateningly behind him to keep Horatio and Marcellus at a distance. Following Hazlitt's belief that 'the highest and most perfect effort' of Kean's art was his performance of Othello's speech, 'Farewell, my queen! on thy sad fall I tread', Kingsley too seemed to have taken cues from Hazlitt's observation: his delivery had the 'hoarseness' attributed to Kean, the uneven, fitfully impressive force of the original.

Kean's acting, Hazlitt said, was 'not of the patrician order'. It was rather, this play indicated, an attempt to upstage the patrician orders. Emulous resentment of the aristocracy rankled creatively in Kean. Proclaiming himself an illegitimate son of the Duke of Norfolk, he believed he was continually being done down by an upper-crust conspiracy. Aristocrats - such as those on the governing Drury Lane Committee - aroused in him the ambivalent feelings of the snubbed snob. Becoming the monarch of the stage was his solution. Fitzsimons's play drew parallels between the actor's life and art by incorporating extracts from *Richard III* into its account of his scheming and straining towards 'the throne' of leading tragedian at Drury Lane. It might have found an even apter instance of reality fusing with role-playing. According to Hazlitt, Kean 'never showed more genius than when - as Sir Giles Overreach in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* - he pronounced the single word "Lord" with an uncomfortable mixture of jawing servility and sarcastic contempt'.

Satirical gentleman

David Alexander

Henry William Bunbury (1750-1811)
Gainsborough's House, Sudbury, Suffolk

Thomas Gainsborough's birthplace is a wholly appropriate place for an exhibition devoted to Henry Bunbury. This gentleman artist, who became the best known of amateur draughtsmen in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, came from a family still resident in Suffolk, and Gainsborough himself owned at least one of his drawings. Some sixty of his drawings, most of them heightened with watercolour, have now been borrowed from a variety of sources, including the Royal collection; and Thomas Patch's caricature painting of a group of young Grand Tourists in Rome, which includes the young Bunbury, has been brought from the United States. The catalogue (16pp. £1.25. 0 946511 00 4) is prefaced by an excellent essay by John Reilly, whose interest in the artist developed from his work as one of the editors of the Yale edition of the letters of Horace Walpole, one of Bunbury's greatest admirers.

As some of the drawings reveal, Bunbury's ideas were often better than his draughtsmanship, though this has a characteristic awkwardness which was clearly appreciated and was respected by the engravers. Bunbury was not the 'second Hogarth' Walpole imagined him to be; he was, however, responsible during the 1770s and 1780s for designing highly amusing social satires as well as charming decorative prints, the latter often masquerading as literary illustrations. The emphasis of this exhibition is upon his drawings; it is true that he exhibited several at the Academy and that his drawings were prized by those who knew him, but his reputation rested on the prints after his death, and the catalogue here includes several discussed in the essay, such as the pencil 'A Tour to Foreign Parts' (1777), which shows a young milord about to be fleeced by a French innkeeper. But several of the major Bunbury delights are here, including the six-foot 'Long Minuet as Danced at Bath' (1787), which can be seen as a forerunner of the strip cartoon.

One point upon which our information is understandably meagre is the extent to which Bunbury benefited financially from prints after his drawings. He had, in the words of his son, 'a carelessness about money which did not befit a younger brother'. Perhaps it was financial need which encouraged him to provide a series of Shakespearean illustrations for the print-seller Thomas Mackillo; these were engraved in the early 1790s, under the patronage of the Duke of York, to whom Bunbury became a Croon of the Bedchamber in 1787. As Walpole had observed in 1780, Bunbury had 'more humour when he invents than when he illustrates'; his young ladies, with their sharp features, pink cheeks and open-eyed innocence, did not transplant altogether successfully from 'furniture' prints, and although designs after Bunbury were still being engraved at the time of his death in 1811, his career had clearly peaked twenty years earlier.

Bunbury is an interesting figure, who had, as Dr Reilly points out, some influence on professional satirists, but he is not an important one and it is unlikely that there will be another Bunbury exhibition for some years. It is therefore a matter of regret, not only that the exhibition will not be seen elsewhere, but that the catalogue is not fuller; the entries on the eighty-one exhibits are minimal, and do not even explain some of their literary connotations; and there are only seven illustrations; this alone will prevent the catalogue from becoming the modest standard work which Bunbury deserves. (The exhibition continues until April 10, and is closed on Mondays and Good Friday.)

UPOLITE 1.50

to the editor

Subsidizing Literature

Sir, - I am glad that William Scammell wrote to you as he did (Letters, February 11), about the Arts Council's inadequate funding of literature. May I lend my support to his views? During my time on the Scottish Arts Council I was often furious as proposals after proposal was turned down through lack of funds for literature.

Those who oppose William Scammell's views will no doubt argue that literature is best supported not by paying writers directly, but rather by helping publishers to publish un-economic items, or even by persuading the public to buy, and by raising Public Lending Right above its present derisory level. In the long run, these methods might indeed be best, since they would have a less distorting effect on literature and are less likely to produce overdevelopment of the silly avant-garde. But in the meantime our writers are being disgracefully neglected.

Like Scammell, I know of a number of excellent writers who have no source of income at all beyond the next few months. It seems not to have occurred to the Arts Council that direct and indirect support of literature are not necessarily alternative measures - that it should engage in both, and increase its literature budget very considerably. Among the many reasons for this is the fact that all the arts depend on literature (perhaps more than they realize) for their continued well-being.

It will also be said that literature receives indirect subsidy already through library grants. That argument might carry some weight if it were true that our public circulating libraries bought most contemporary literature of quality. But this is by no means the case any longer. In our reading for the James Tait Black awards, my readers and I have occasion each year to try to obtain the most promising seventy or so biographies and 200-300 novels. Very few of these are bought by the public libraries in this capital city.

ALASTAIR FOWLER.
Department of English Literature,
University of Edinburgh, David Hume
Tower, George Square, Edinburgh.

Sir, - How can Robert Hewison (Behind the Lines, February 25) write such balderdash? "The natural injustice done to writers by a free literary service," indeed!

It needs to be said for the umpteenth

time that a substantial number of books would never be published at all were publishers not able to plan for substantial library sales (public, academic, etc) in their budgeting.

As a bookseller I have incontrovertible evidence from personal experience that libraries are excellent sales-promotion agencies for authors. Many, many times customers say that they have seen a certain book in the local public library and now want me to sell them a copy for themselves.

Public libraries are doing a splendid job for authors. They don't look for any thanks but it would be good if authors would join librarians and booksellers in defending the library service against further cuts by uninformed politicians and indeed in campaigning for its expansion to regain some at least of the ground lost in the last few years.

JOHN MAY.
5 Hotham Road, London SW15.

'Earth to Earth'

Sir, - Last week thirteen people signed a letter in your columns complaining that they and others in Winkleigh, North Devon, were upset by my book, *Earth to Earth* (Allen Lane, 1982) because of various "errors".

The book tells the story of two bachelor brothers and their sister, the Luxtons of West Chapple, Winkleigh, who were found killed in mysterious circumstances on their farm in September 1975. The events attracted much sensational attention from the media. Local people were deeply affected, as were the surviving Luxton family.

Seven years elapsed before *Earth to Earth* was published. A proportion of the book was composed of interviews. These were heavily edited and in many cases locations and personalities disguised to avoid unnecessary distress. All this is clearly stated in the preface.

Despite these safeguards, and although nothing derogatory is said of them, three particular individuals were deeply hurt by their appearance in the book. They had, in fact, been offered the protection of pseudonyms but had declined. These three individuals were among the signatories of last week's letter. Most of the other signatories are either relatives, or their employees or close neighbours. After the appearance of complimentary copies of the book in September 1982, they promptly made their strong feelings known to the

publisher and sought to have the book withdrawn and their names fictionalized in an altered text. When this was rejected, they alleged various "errors" to discredit the book as a whole. On careful examination of their arguments and an exhaustive scrutiny of my supporting evidence, the publisher and their solicitors could see no good reason for withdrawal.

Now, six months after the book's publication, they are seeking to question the book's entire credibility in public by citing these same "errors". Typical of these "errors" is the claim that I mistook the location of the Luxton sister's funeral, which took place in Winkleigh and which I place at Brushford. The question may be settled by reference to parish records: there was one funeral service for all three Luxtons at Winkleigh, where the brothers were buried in the family grave, then a second more intimate service at Brushford later the same day for Frances, who was then buried there.

There is also the bald statement that a certain farm worker has no recollection of being interviewed by me. My journalist notebook and other circumstantial evidence conclusively settles that point in my favour.

While I sympathize with the signatories' situation (it is always tragic when people feel they have been portrayed in a distorted light in print), and while I concede that there may well have been unavoidable errors of a minor sort, I do not accept that *Earth to Earth* contains any serious inaccuracies whatsoever. Four fifths of the book is based on incontrovertible evidence in the public domain, including statements to the police, local records, statements at inquest, newspaper reports, family letters, diaries, wills and various historical records in Exeter Public Library.

Verbal submissions are, of course, notoriously suspect, and readers will be quick to spot all manner of inconsistencies. That is the whole point. My intention in allowing informants to speak for themselves was to enable the reader to decide what was true and what was false.

Those who have become intrigued by this correspondence may well wish to purchase *Earth to Earth* and do the same.

Whatever the motives behind the signatories' desire to see the book discredited, they should know that its reception in Winkleigh as a whole and in the Luxton family has not been

entirely hostile. A typical endorsement comes from the dead family's closest surviving relative, William Luxton, a barrister living in retirement and the only informant to have actually lived at West Chapple Farm under the same roof as the Luxtons and to have known them intimately for more than fifty years. On 17 October, 1982, he wrote me the following unsolicited letter which started as follows:

I have now read your book carefully several times and these are my comments. The conditions existing at West Chapple over the period covered by the book are, I think, accurately portrayed by you. In a rural community life with gossip and petty jealousies it could not have been easy to obtain a true picture. You have obviously tried and I think you have broadly succeeded.

JOHN CORNWELL.
c/o Allen Lane Ltd, 536 Kings Road, London SW10.

'Difficult Women'

Sir, - In her review (February 25) of David Plante's *Difficult Women*, Lorna Sage writes that "The memoir of Jean Rhys... is the most interesting of the three and... the one where the exploitation seems most mutual. So far as one can judge, that is, Jean Rhys's fragmentary autobiography *Smile Please* would never have existed at all if David Plante had not acted as her amanuensis in the three or four years before her death..."

I do not see how Jean Rhys can be said to have exploited David Plante in any way. She was grateful for his help, and in his book he acknowledges how generously she paid him for it. And what exactly did the help amount to? The first part of *Smile Please*, describing her childhood in Dominica, was dictated in Devon to another young writer friend, Michael Schwab; the last part, "From a Diary: at the Ropemaker's Arms", was written in 1951: both these were completed before she died. The middle section, on which she worked in London with David Plante (and a large proportion of this, too, already existed in MS or typescript) before their collaboration began, is indeed fragmentary, being both unfinished and unrevised, I think everyone who knew her well would agree that she did not intend the sixty pages to be published as they stand.

David Plante's book has given Lorna Sage the impression that they were both operating much of the time in "false faith... if he was, as he puts it, 'false'

to her because he loved her only as a writer, then she reciprocated by failing to take any interest in him as a writer at all." I saw Jean Rhys regularly during those years, and remember that she had read David Plante's books, admired them and was always ready to discuss them seriously. There was no bad faith on her side.

FRANCIS WYNDHAM,
19 Lonsdale Road, London W11.

'The English Hero'

Sir, - Robert Halsband says in his review (March 4) of *The English Hero, 1660-1800*, edited by Robert Folkenflik, that my contribution to that volume "is entirely about the mock-heroic style of Swift's verse". In fact the essay reports the almost total absence of mock-heroic in Swift's verse, as anyone who had got as far as the second paragraph might have noticed.

I have no particular expectation that Mr Halsband would read any essay mine, even if he was reviewing it, but should not like anyone who had read Swift's verse to suppose that I thought there was a lot of mock-heroic in it.

CLAUDE RAWSON.
Department of English, University of Warwick, Coventry.

Papal Elections

Sir, - J. H. Whitfield accuses me (Letters, February 25) of believing that "no one" knew about the supposed practices ensuing on the reign of Pope Joan. Actually, I asked "how many" modern scholars knew about this. Now I know of at least two, Professor Patrides, whose learned book I was reviewing, and Professor Whitfield. Patrides's sources call the chair a *sedes stercorata*, Whitfield's, a *sedes stercoraria*. Whichever phrase is used, however, the supposed object would be a fairly embarrassing one.

KATHERINE DUNCAN-JONES.
Somerville College, Oxford.

C. M. Turbayne's edition of *Berkeley's Critical and Interpretive Essays*, noticed in the TLS of January 14, published in this country by Manchester University Press (222p, paperback £9.75, 0 7190 09227).

The UK publisher of *O'Casey's An Ideal Husband*, No. 1, edited by Robert G. Lowy, Macmillan, not Gill and Macmillan, stated in our issue of January 14.

Among this week's contributors

LORD ANNAN was Provost of King's College Cambridge from 1956 to 1966. During the Second World War he was a member of MI14 (German Section), in the War Office and on the Joint Intelligence Staff in the War Cabinet Office.

ALAN BOLD is currently editing *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*.

SIR ALEC CAIRNCROSS's books include *Inflation, Growth and International Finance*, 1975.

COLIN GREENLAND's *The Entropy Exhibition: Michael Moorcock and the British "New Wave" in Science Fiction* was published last week.

J. N. GRAY is the author of *Mill on Liberty: a defence*, published earlier this year.

J. D. GURNEY is a lecturer in Persian History at the Oriental Institute, Oxford.

TONY HARRISON's most recent collection of poems, *Continuities*, was published in 1981.

JONATHAN LEAR is a Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge.

HERMIONE LEE is the author of *Elizabeth Bowen: An Estimation*, 1981.

ADAM MORTON is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Bristol.

VIRGIL NEMOIANU teaches Comparative Literature at the Catholic University of America, Washington D C.

ONORA O'NEILL is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Essex.

ROBERT PARKER is the author of *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in early Greek Religion* which will be published later this year.

MARK PLATTS is the author of *Ways of Meaning*, published in 1979.

CRAIG RAINE's most recent collection of poems, *A Free Translation*, was published in 1981.

JOHN RAY is Reader in Egyptology at the University of Cambridge.

TAPAN RAYCHAUDHURI is co-editor with Irfan Habib of *The Cambridge Economic History of India: Volume 1 c. 1200-c. 1750*, 1982.

MALCOLM ROGERS is Deputy Director of the National Portrait Gallery.

ALAN SKED is co-editor of *Crisis and Controversy: Essays in Honour of A. J. P. Taylor*, 1976.

DAVID SMITH is a lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Essex.

JOHN STOKES's *Oscar Wilde* was published in 1978.

incentive for trade in the richer, more varied Islamic capitals, an urgent need to refute the new heresy, and the advantage of well-established, indigenous communities ("sweet-water Christians") as well as contacts established through the Crusader states and pilgrimage centres. By contrast, Muslims usually needed little more from Western Europe than Slavonic slaves, Frankish weapons and English wool. They were subjected to greater religious intolerance than their Christian counterparts, and from the early modern period Western quarantine arrangements compounded the difficulties of foreign travel.

But, as Lewis rightly points out, this explanation cannot hold good for the whole period. From the late fifteenth century onwards, the Ottomans shared a common frontier with an increasingly powerful enemy. They had both the need and the opportunity for closer study; they failed to respond and their attitudes became dangerously obsolete. Lewis is convinced that it is the intrinsic nature of Islam and its precociously early development that had shuttered the Muslim world from a better appreciation. Islam had superseded Christianity, regarding it as an earlier, imperfect revelation and treating it with contempt or indifference. Muslim civilization had been established through conquest and developed so rapidly that it could afford to feel arrogant towards the backward barbarians of Europe. These attitudes, assimilated into the Islamic heritage, survived into the period when its early vigour had been sapped, when it had crystallized and shown itself impervious to external stimuli. It was only the Ottoman ability to challenge Europe militarily as late as the eighteenth century that masked the Muslim world's inferiority in most other fields.

Lewis illustrates this "decline" in the field of Islamic law. After the "closing of the gates of *ijtihād*" in the ninth century, the assertion of independent judgment was forbidden. This, it is claimed, had a much deeper effect than merely strengthening the four recognized law schools; it shaped a mentality in which compilation and repetition were admissible, but not innovation and originality. In science and medicine, too, these same attitudes prevailed: Muslims "did not think in terms of the progress of research, the transformation of ideas, the gradual growth of knowledge... there is no attempt to follow new discoveries and little awareness even of the existence of such a process."

Yet, whether causative or symptomatic of this deep conservatism, the ban on *ijtihād* was not total, as is here suggested. The beginning to break away from their total reliance on Hellenistic and classical Islamic tradition, in literature, however, the less communicable element in any cultural interchange, there was an almost total barrier, and as late as the second decade of the nineteenth century, Muslims had still to make do with a French pastiche of the *Thousand and One Nights*, Fénelon's *Télémaque* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as guides to the heritage of European literature.

Such a lack of interest and curiosity among Muslim scholars about what happened beyond the Muslim frontiers needs an explanation. Throughout most of this long period, it was, as Lewis recognizes, Christians who had greater need and also greater opportunity for understanding their neighbours. Christians had greater

need to understand their neighbours, and Lewis is right to say that the Muslim world's inferiority in most other fields.

In the most rapidly transmitted of all fields, technology, Muslims were quick to recognize innovation, especially with respect to the navy, artillery and mining. Within twenty years of the Ottomans had a copy of Columbus's map of America in the early sixteenth century, by using the square-rigged sailing ships, their vessels had reached as far as Iceland. Yet they failed to sustain a vigorous indigenous technology. It was the same with printing. It was first introduced by Jewish refugees to the Ottoman empire in the late fifteenth century, yet books of Arabic or Turkish were permitted to be printed only in 1729, and then only in Constantinople.

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ISLAM

BERNARD LEWIS

The Muslim Discovery of Europe
330pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£12.50.
0 297 78140 5

Bernard Lewis's latest book is a study of a neglected theme that has intermittently occupied him for over twenty-five years. He has now pieced together his earlier research into a general survey, rich in anecdotal information and amusing anecdote, though in a series of disparate articles and talks. Neither this uneven, anecdotal manner of presentation, nor a slightly sour tone, should disguise the relevance and importance of the theme - one civilization's perception of another, and of itself.

In Lewis's view, the Muslim world remained curiously uninterested in its northern neighbours. In 1068 they seemed to Sa'ad b. Ahmad from Toledo "more like beasts than men... overcome by ignorance and apathy, lack of discernment and stupidity"; in 1780, on the eve of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, they were still "in contemptible but now also dangerous. Even then, there was no attempt to explain the reasons of Western success, just as in earlier centuries there had been no attempt to learn contemporary European languages, to examine Western institutions, history, economy or geography. Not a single grammar or dictionary of any Western language appeared in manuscript or print until well into the nineteenth century. Understanding of Christianity never progressed beyond a stock corpus of national traits. "An eighteenth-century Ottoman", Lewis says, "knew as much of the states and nations of Europe as a nineteenth-century European about the tribes and peoples of Africa."

Lewis illustrates this "decline" in the field of Islamic law. After the "closing of the gates of *ijtihād*" in the ninth century, the assertion of independent judgment was forbidden. This, it is claimed, had a much deeper effect than merely strengthening the four recognized law schools; it shaped a mentality in which compilation and repetition were admissible, but not innovation and originality. In science and medicine, too, these same attitudes prevailed: Muslims "did not think in terms of the progress of research, the transformation of ideas, the gradual growth of knowledge... there is no attempt to follow new discoveries and little awareness even of the existence of such a process."

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Such a lack of interest and curiosity among Muslim scholars about what happened beyond the Muslim frontiers needs an explanation. Throughout most of this long period, it was, as Lewis recognizes, Christians who had greater need and also greater opportunity for understanding their neighbours. Christians had greater

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The closed frontiers

J. D. Gurney

unreasonably concentrates on the Ottomans. Whether in diplomacy, commerce or war, they came, most directly into contact with Europeans. Predictably, it was there that the earliest and deepest impact of European ideas would be detected. In this sense, they were "far ahead of the rest of the Islamic world"; but it would be too simple to take the reaction of the orthodox, *hanafi* Ottomans as the generalized Muslim one.

Thus, several of the details that make up this description of the Ottoman response are not applicable to those ethnic or sectarian groups who provided exceptions in the earlier period. The introduction of syphilis, to take a painful example of European contact, provides an instructive comparison. Within a decade of its arrival in Europe from the New World in 1492, a Persian doctor had

described the new disease, traced its rapid progress across the country, and written an excellent account of it. This was followed a few decades later by a second, fuller study, in which a mercury pill was preferred as treatment to the European prescription, considered too dangerous for general use. It was not until well into the next century that the first Ottoman work appeared, indicating some acquaintance with European medicine, but a hundred years out of date. In the study of language, too, Lewis's generalizations are not borne out by the experience of travellers in seventeenth-century Iran. The enthusiasm of the gifted young scholar whom Pietro della Valle met in Lar, his desire to learn Latin and to read the very latest books sent from Europe, or Olearius's mulla and soldier at Shamakhi who were studying German, suggest a different view.

Such qualifications might refine Lewis's account and indicate the diversity of response, but it is unlikely that they would significantly change the broad outline. Yet two fundamental questions are ignored. Firstly, how unusual were Muslims in their attitude to alien civilizations in general, both Christian and others? Curiosity about other peoples, their beliefs and way of life has hardly been the norm. The Chinese scarcely acknowledged that other civilizations existed. Hindus remained apathetic to neighbouring cultures. Medieval Europe, as Lewis admits, followed this same pattern of ignorance, suspicion and xenophobia. Only Renaissance Europe was different, and what marked it off from other cultures was its composite heritage of Greek classics and Christian scripture, and the relativistic element in Greek thought. The Greeks may have disliked their barbarians as intensely as did most medieval Muslims or Christians, but they were also curious and prepared to entertain the idea that in some aspects they might be better than themselves. This part of the Greek heritage did not pass into Islam. Yet compared with other civilizations, Islam seems relatively more open, notwithstanding its arrogance and conservatism. If Lewis had compared Muslim attitudes towards non-European civilizations, this might have appeared in its right perspective. Biruni and Rashid al-Din have few peers.

Secondly, should it be assumed that civilizations under threat by others will become more interested in those by whom they are threatened? Such civilizations may well borrow, reluctantly and out of necessity, but they will also reassert their own heritage. The Byzantines borrowed, but expressed little curiosity about Islam, and little interest in the Turks, for all that the latter eventually overwhelmed them. The Ottomans, over a comparable time-scale, borrowed from Europe on a superficial level, but above all they protected themselves and their culture as long as they could. The Ottomans saw Europe as the Byzantines had seen the Ottomans: a threat, a different civilization, a different creed, against which they had to defend their heritage as best they might.

The basic fallacy is that Lewis expects late eighteenth-century Muslims to have predicted what the West had in store and to have recast their civilization in its image. When Jabarti witnessed the success of Napoleon's campaign in Egypt, why should he have realized this was more than a well-equipped, efficient army and fleet? In 1798, why should he have anticipated the railway, the steamship, and the rest of the organization, science and technology that subsequently has shaken the entire world? When this was grasped, the real Muslim discovery of Europe starts; but at this point the book disappointingly ends.

Robert Irwin

FRANCIS ROBINSON
Atlas of the Islamic World since 1500
238pp. Oxford: Phaidon. £18.
0 7148 2200 0

The Atlas of the Islamic World since 1500 is more of a picture-book than a reference atlas and more of a text, intelligently illustrated, than either.

The eye, as it skims, is ravished by the resplendent achievements of Islamic art and notes the maps which track intellectual movement and revolt and expanding frontiers. Only at the end, and after reflection, does a sort of mental double-take occur. For did not Gibb and Bowen in their *Islamic Society and the West* (1950) write of "the stationary, or retrograde civilization" and, referring to the Arab lands in the eighteenth century, assert that it was "not an exaggeration to say that after so many centuries of immobility the

processes of agriculture, industry, exchange and learning had become little more than automatic, and had resulted in a species of atrophy that rendered those engaged in them all but incapable of changing their methods or outlook in the slightest degree?"

Unenlightened despotism, intellectual torpor and the ultimate "Triumph of the West" - should these not have been the chief themes to be illustrated by this new atlas?

That the Atlas conveys quite a

Unendingly hermeneutic

Oliver Taplin

CHARLES SEGAL
Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' *Bacchae*

36pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press. £26.80 (paperback, £9.70). 0 691 06528 4

One of the bosses of the "post-structuralist mafia" has let it be known that "the reader for his part must lose himself in a hermeneutic 'initiation' that makes all rules of closure appear arbitrary". Charles Segal complacently does his best to be open, eclectic and infatigable: the resultant book is shapeless. Perhaps a deconstructionist approach, entails a self-conscious fragmentation, a renunciation of argumentative moulding for fear of imposing a definite meaning. This is a new turn for Professor Segal who, though he always writes with facility and prolixity, has usually shown a clear sense of direction.

The first half might be broadly termed "structuralist" and consists mainly of a meandering rhapsody of polynomials. *Bacchae* is a happy hunting ground, especially if you rootle your material up from here, there and everywhere in the play without much regard for sequence or context. There may seem to be some familiarity to the Lévi-Straussian conclusion that "the spatial, biological, familial, political and sexual codes are all homologous". But as long ago as 1960 Roland Barthes asserted that tragedy "refuse to meditate, tiént le conflit ouvert"; and sure enough there are persistent warning notes of collapsing the antitheses, of fluidity, sliding, dissolving and disintegration. In the last quarter of the book the rapidly decomposing jargon of deconstruction is finally wheeled out - gap, trace, absence, supplement, difference, arbitrariness. These are some of the recycled words which are "meant" to convey a crisis of confidence in language and meaning which is claimed to have characterized the last years of the fifth century BC no less than of the twentieth AD.

The two longest and most interesting, and least formulaic, chapters come in between, though I cannot see how they mediate between the structuralist and deconstructionist parts. One is psychological, and it is here that Segal's eclecticism falters. He cannot disguise his reservations about Freud and Lacan, and the auxiliary verb "may" creeps in again and again. "Elevation in the high tree may symbolise the precocious delusion of phallic power." Or it may not? More confidently Segal sees Pentheus' fate as a failed *des passage*, though he remains vague over particulars. He

might like recent speculations about initiation into the Dionysiac mysteries - though that might well be an archaizing return to the earliest themes of tragedy, which would not suit Segal's view of *Bacchae* as a novelty of the *fin-de-siècle* crisis.

The other central chapter is called "Metatragedy", which is defined as "self-conscious reflection by the dramatist on the theatricality and illusion-creating power of his own work". It is presented in a theatre regarded as "the magical space of the anti-world, the carnivalesque, the ludic". With or without this "eclectic" vocabulary, there is surely something to this. *Bacchae* is the only Greek tragedy which handles the costume of disguise on stage, and this kind of "play-acting" contributes to the bizarre of the cat-and-mouse scene when Dionysus escorts Pentheus to the mountain. But Segal's starting point is not of this sort: it is the "fact" that Dionysus is the god of the theatre - in fact, it is said, of tragedy and comedy, of all sorts of illusion, of masking and unmasking, of religious ecstasy, and so forth. But this is use of "of" any more

than a pedagogic over-simplification? Is Dionysus the god of drama because it was performed at his festival? Athletic contests were held at festivals of Zeus and of Apollo and of Poseidon - they are not particular to the god of the festival. Homer was performed at the Panathenaia, but that does not make Athena the god of epic. Despite Nietzsche, it should not be taken for granted that there is anything intrinsically or essentially Dionysian about Greek tragedy.

Apart from this issue (where my views may be eccentric) Segal looks especially to two speculative matters of staging to demonstrate *Bacchae*'s "metatragic deconstruction of its own illusionistic power". He claims that the "palace miracles" were not given any concrete representation and thus draw attention to their own theatrical illusionality. But does this mean that anything entrusted to the audience's imagination is thereby metatheatrical? This criterion would extend to much of earlier tragedy; yet Segal implies, wisely, that *Bacchae*'s metatragedy is a special feature of late Euripides. Secondly, he supposes that when

Agave brings on her son's head she is carrying the mask which the actor of Pentheus had worn earlier, and he stresses the possible word-play on *prosopon* ("face"/"mask") at line 1277. This is the line with which Cadmus gently forces his daughter to recognize that she is not carrying an animal's head but her own son's. Segal does not face the way that this, for him the most overtly ludic line, comes at the moment when the tragic grimace of human life and death is reassured over the bizarre tragic-pantomime of some of the earlier scenes, when the short-lived game turns into life-long misery.

Segal does not pay much attention to another more clearly ambiguous mask, that of the Stranger - Dionysus. He smiles. A smiling mask in a tragedy would seem to undermine the whole genre. The unsettling effect of this has been well treated by Helene Foley in a recent article; as she puts it, "the god thus denies us clear access either to the comic laughter or to the tragic pity by which we control our theatrical experience." We should go on to observe how this ambivalent tone gives

way in the final scenes to unadulterated tragic pathos. We mortals are left behind by the smiling god in a world of grief. It is, by the way, unfortunate that because of textual damage we do not know whether Dionysus still wore this smiling mask for his final epiphany in *machina*. This is, indeed, a gap which has left only a trace, but not in the deconstructionist sense.

The stuff of this book seems to have suffered a sort of intellectual *sparagmos*. Scattered throughout are sensitive observations, fine points of language, and thought-provoking ideas. It may be significant that in its eclectic, closure-refusing pages we are given no sense of the overall shape of the *Bacchae* itself. There has been no substantiation for the penultimate sentence of the book: "Euripides has given this play a highly formalized traditional structure, marked by careful articulation of the part, striking beauty of language, intricate strength and deliberate orderliness of design." Would that Segal had imparted some of the same qualities to *Dionysiac Poetics* and *Euripides' Bacchae*.

MUSIC

Evaluation evaded

Michael Tanner

CHARLES OSBORNE
The World Theatre of Wagner: A Celebration of 150 Years of Wagner Productions

246pp, with illustrations. Oxford: Phaidon. £25. 0 7148 2258 2

RUDOLF HARTMANN

Richard Strauss: The Staging of his Operas and Ballets
200pp. Oxford: Phaidon. £25. 0 7148 2254 X

KAREN FORSYTH

Aradne auf Naxos by Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Richard Strauss: In Genesis and Meaning
310pp. Oxford University Press. £20. 0 19 515336 0

It seems to be characteristic of writers on opera that they are interested in every aspect of the subject except the significance and worth of the works they discuss. Of course there are so many ways of writing about opera and its epiphenomena, as *Opera* magazine demonstrates, which are not confrontations with the works themselves, and the majority of opera scholars are little concerned with value, but the incentive to produce books which evade the crucial responsibilities is evident. Of the three under review, two are glosses devoted, as their titles suggest, to productions, and one is a dissertation, with all the armour-plating that implies.

To get the worst over first: Charles Osborne's *The World Theatre of Wagner* is an unmitigated disgrace, with attention only because it illustrates the depths to which the subject can sink. What is surprising is that Phaidon should have published it, presumably on the belief that since this is Wagner-time, there will be buyers for a book which, placed through rapidly, is at least full of photographs. The blurb, and indeed the subtitle - "A Celebration of 150 Years of Wagner Productions" - suggest that it will be a comprehensive survey of what is a thoroughly documented field. It is no such thing. In the case of the *Ring*, for instance, there are two photographs of the great 1924 Wagner production at Bayreuth of 1951-58, and ten of the 1970s, which was of no interest; many of the photos are merely close-ups of the leading singers, and it isn't clear to me that anyone is going to be interested by a caption which runs "Don Clavand as Wotan in the ENO production of THE RINGWOLD [sic], a role he undertook when the production went on tour in 1973". Far too high a proportion of the pictures are from manifestly bad productions in what English reviewers invariably refer to as the "Royal Opera House or the Coliseum, and there are not nearly enough of the real landmarks of Wagnerian production. From what we are shown, there is not much to celebrate.

The text is of a scarcely believable perfunctoriness. It is assumed that readers won't know the plots, so they are presented as if they were entries for a *New Statesman* competition to summarize them in telegraphese. Of interest, and attempts to cast an individual light, are "marvellously" obscure items: on *Lohegrin*, Osborne writes "the word 'spiritual' means more to some people than to others. Like so many problems, however, this can be reduced to one of semantics. For 'spiritual' one can substitute 'conscious', or, if psychological terms are unacceptable, 'aesthetic'. For Wagner himself, the terms were interchangeable." Thus the Literature Director of the Arts Council. It is alarming that for a man in such a position, problems of semantics can be so easily dealt with, or that he Homer has only a "temporal" compared with the "eternal" of the optimism of Aeschylus, in the power of Pethio's eyes.

Osborne's masterpiece of concentrated fatuity and error is the last which trickles through the ill-chosen photographs of *Meistersinger* productions. On page 92 alone we see

"When his landlord's dog bit his thumb, the composer seized the excuse to stop work on his score for several weeks"; and "Wagner immediately went to Munich and became the close friend of the young homosexual monarch, who was already well advanced towards the insanity in which he was to end his days"; and "*Die Meistersinger*'s premiere was an absolute triumph, the only unfortunate incident occurring when Wagner, who had sat consort-like beside Ludwig in the royal box, outraged the feelings of the good citizens of Munich by stepping forward to acknowledge the applause." Each of these statements is not only false, but knowingly so: one couldn't produce them unless one knew the truth that they distorted. The remainder of the chapter on the work, apart from odds and ends on various productions, is devoted to a strenuous insistence on the harmful effects on it of "the composer's intransigent racial theories", together with a claim to their irrelevance to the significance of *Die Meistersinger*. It isn't easy to imagine a worse book than this.

The two books on Richard Strauss are at the very least respectable. Rudolf Hartmann, Strauss's close friend and collaborator, has written the book on him that Osborne should have written on Wagner. Of course his task was easier, since the number of production-styles has been smaller, the period over which they have been produced only half that of Wagner's works; but the operas are more numerous, and many of them are of so little interest that it is a considerable achievement to retain the reader's attention throughout the book. Traditionalist in every respect as Hartmann manifestly and explicitly is, he begins each chapter with an account of the gestation of the work, proceeds to an admirable plot-summary in which key points are highlighted and special difficulties for the producer discussed, then gives an account of the circumstances of the first performance.

Unfortunately for those best able to tell it, the truth is often a very private affair. It is to Giovanni Battista Meneghini's credit that he declined many lucrative offers for his story: Callas is a subject for the best-seller, a fact of which many have taken advantage. No such motive can be ascribed to the octogenarian Meneghini. His undertaking centres on emotional loss, not financial gain. In that way it is a sad volume, and by contrast the vicarious gloss of other Callas books is shown for what it is. But the whole truth can be as embarrassing for the reader as for the teller: one being immortalized by her constant love-notes to Meneghini should turn to angry writs and violent exchanges. She could write to him: "If I put everything that I feel for you into words, I will be 'marvellous'." These are remarkable feelings, and likely to have a limited life.

The violence of Callas's character is sufficient warning. A waiter who tries to touch her breast is attacked with such force that he gashes his head open on the hotel room door. Callas smashes her fist through her father's mistress when she takes exception to her singing. During *Tosca*, when Barroto Pinto replaces her with Tebaldi, she threatens him with a bronze inkstand, and knees him in the stomach for attempting to call the police. That the same person should draw up "Prussian guidelines" for the domestic in Milan is no surprise. Two of them are revealing: "etiquette of them, are revealing: 'etiquette' without excuses from anyone." "One will never say no to what has been

asked, and no more of that 'Yes, sir', 'Yes, ma'am' nonsense." For all his understanding, Meneghini remains subject to Callas's frequently "uncompromising, intransigent attitude". Her dislike of Visconti's homosexuality overrules Meneghini's admiration for him. "Her aversion was obvious, extreme, and at times almost manic." She said that she did not want him with her, that even his scent and breath annoyed her. Yet she could have been expected to sympathize with Visconti's high ideals, his contempt for vulgarity and for easily won approval. His remarks about her *Viola* are some of the most telling written about that famous role.

For the rest, Meneghini writes of Onassis and his gang as one might expect, best evinced in the chapter heading "How Onassis Robbed Me of My Wife" and "Diary of a Betrayal". Other singers receive sparse comment, and Callas's detractors are unequivocally dismissed. Meneghini's love-story often reads like an old man's blind infatuation, and his supposition that she committed suicide shows his

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Verdi engrossed Hofmannsthal a great deal in those months. He had bought a number of records of the Italian master; when he listened to the aria "Credo in un dio crudele", his expression was impressively stony, mask-like; he let the record play again, and listened with the closest attention, not speaking for a long time. He retired to his room and didn't want to hear any more music.

Such incidental illuminations would have helped the earnest, groping reader on his way.

As it is, it is unlikely that another work on *Ariadne* will ever be required. Miss Forsyth's estimate of the work isn't entirely clear, partly because on the last page her anxieties return, as well they might, about the relationship between "the genetic method" and the drawing of evaluative conclusions. It would be sad if opera criticism, supposing it gets seriously under way, had to relive all the traumas of literary criticism in its connections with scholarship; sad, but not in the least surprising.

There is a photograph of the La Scala *Traviata* (1955) in the book. It is the second act. Bastianini looks on as Callas turns away in anguish. The eloquence of the picture beggars the written word, as the silent Meneghini must have believed for so long. It is said that his silence had to be broken.

The Metropolitan Opera Classics Library is a new series, and this week sees the publication of its first volume, which is devoted to *Der Rosenkavalier* (203pp. Little, Brown. £9.95. 0 316 56834 1). It contains a foreword by Anthony A. Bjis, General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera, an introduction to the opera by George B. Marek, who also contributes a "Reevaluation" of Strauss's relations with Hofmannsthal, a summary of the opera by John Cox, the complete libretto in German, with parallel English translation, the production history of *Der Rosenkavalier* at the Met, with lists of casts and performances, and a colour photographic essay on their current, lavish, production. There are also a bibliography and a discography.

Michael Kennedy's *Strauss*, first published in 1976, has recently been reissued in paperback (274pp. Dent. £3.95. 0 460 02176 1). It has extensive sections of biography and criticism, as well as a calendar, a catalogue of works and a bibliography of Strauss studies.

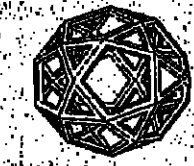
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Glottally chronometric

Stephanie West

RICHARD JANKO

Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns: Diachronic development in epic diction

322pp. Cambridge University Press. £25. 0 521 23869 2

No one seriously concerned with archaic Greek poetry can afford to ignore this book, even if glottochronometry does not sound like everybody's cup of tea. Richard Janko's primary concern is with the origins of the major Homeric hymns, and by close examination of their language he seeks to illuminate the obscurity surrounding the circumstances in which they were composed. It would of course make little sense to consider the hymns without reference to other early Greek hexameter poetry, and this study constantly impinges on some of the most controversial issues in the literary history of archaic Greece; fortunately Dr Janko is well equipped to face the old lions which Gilbert Murray pictured lying in wait for those who

venture far into Homeric territory.

The core of the book lies in the study of diachronic and regional development in the traditional epic diction, based on statistical comparisons of the use of archaic and innovative features in the various works concerned. The value of this method of inquiry was already recognized in the nineteenth century, the most popular subject, for investigation being the observance and neglect of digamma; however, studies of individual phenomena in isolation failed to inspire confidence. More recently others have experimented with several such criteria. But in range, thoroughness, and statistical expertise Janko goes far beyond anything of the sort previously attempted.

He concentrates on ten criteria (though he glances at half a dozen more), from which some clear and interesting results emerge. The *Odyssey* is close to, but always after, the *Iliad*; the same relation holds between the *Works and Days* and the *Hymns*. The Hesiodic pair being linguistically more advanced than the Homeric. The *Hymn to Aphrodite* is close to Homer, while the *Hymn to Demeter* and the Delian part of the *Hymn to Apollo* stand nearer to

Hesiod; the results for the *Shield of Heracles*, the *Hymn to Hermes*, and the Pythian part of the *Hymn to Apollo* are inconsistent. "Linguistically more advanced" does not, of course, as Janko points out, necessarily mean "later"; still, no one doubts that the *Odyssey* and the *Works and Days* are respectively later than the *Iliad* and the *Theogony*, so that some correlation between linguistic development and relative date seems undeniable.

However, we really want to proceed beyond what we already know. Dead reckoning from this linguistic evidence is tricky, in view of the lack of generally recognized landmarks by which we may check our bearings; but Janko does wonders with relative chronology, and occasionally, with due caution, hazards some dates. His argumentation is always stimulating and ingenious, and the reader who has followed patiently through rugged tables of short dative-plurals and assorted genitives presently gains a vantage-point from which it even seems possible to discern some features of the prehistory of the epics.

The agnostic will of course urge the need to take account of many variables. Thus, even if we concede the general principle expressed in Milman

Parry's unprovable assertion that "the language of oral poetry changes as a whole neither faster nor slower than the spoken language", the pattern of linguistic change may, as Janko himself points out, be complicated by deliberate archaization; we also have to reckon with other forms of idiosyncratic variation between poets, as well as with the effects of differences in subject-matter and in geographical environment. We must also remember that these works have not come to us sealed in a time-capsule; it would be unrealistic to assume that they have all suffered equally and consistently from scribal modernization in the course of transmission. But though it is easy to point to possible sources of inaccuracy, it is only fair to add that the author has usually seen himself, and he does not make exaggerated claims for the precision of linguistic change as a chronometer.

We cannot expect to be shown short cuts in this area:

On a huge hill
Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he
Reach her, about must, and about must go.
Dr Janko has explored a difficult and interesting route, and deserves the thanks of other travellers.

Many of the themes studied in the book are not distinctive of archaic Athens and the fifth century. Homer in particular offers interesting material. He is put rather one side by Buxton, on the ground that *peltho*'s favoured home is democracy; and it is certainly true that *Odysseus* is commended for giving the populist orator Theocritus, and persuading him. But there are counter-arguments for persuasion other than that of democratic assembly, and the complex of Greek literature with debate, and public interaction between individuals, with decisions and the factors that determine them can be seen as a heritage from Homer. Nestor, for instance, is a model of persuasive diplomacy. *Odysseus* tries to reason with the monster Polyphemus; his honest persuasion is countered by force, he turns to more devious means. Above all, the affirmation of *peltho*'s values with which the *Iliad* ends is possible only because Achilles yields the persuasion of Priam. Finally, in Book Nine, Achilles has been magnificently, but disastrously, durate before persuasion - and we know such stories to have been common themes of the early epic. The position of the pre-epic Homeric tragedians are also interesting, for Homer has only a "temporal" compared with the "eternal" of the optimism of Aeschylus, in the power of Pethio's eyes.

Upstairs 1.50

Terms for disagreeing on

Jeremy Waldron

ROGER SCRUTON

A Dictionary of Political Thought
499pp. Macmillan. £12.
0 333 33439 6

"The Light of humane minds", said Thomas Hobbes, "is Perspicuous Words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity. Metaphors, and senseless and ambiguous words, are like *ignes fatui*, and reasoning upon them, is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities, and their end, contention and sedition, or contempt." It was his awareness of the violence of words and of the possibility that a mere philosopher could "fright men from obeying the Laws of their Country with empty names" that led Hobbes to propose a radically new science of politics. If only political science could be built up as a system of clear and unequivocal definitions, modelled on the structure of his beloved Euclid, then a reader could no more deny the necessity of absolute government, given Hobbes's axioms of human nature, than he could deny given definitions of point, line and angle, the theorem of Pythagoras. Rigorous argument based on exact definition – that was the Hobbesian remedy for social and political disorder.

It is a mark perhaps of Hobbes's failure in this enterprise, and a tribute certainly to the continuity of Western political thought, that the very problems of definition he was determined to resolve in 1651 remain focal points of theoretical dispute in political studies today. *Justice*, *democracy*, *law*, *freedom*, *rights*, *power*, *authority* and *sovereignty*: we simply do not have generally accepted definitions for any of these cardinal terms. We know what they mean of course, or rather we know how to use

them: aggressively and tendentiously, as slogans for campaigns and rallying-cries for factions. But the possibility of basing a theory of politics on exact and agreed definitions of these concepts is as remote now as ever. Why are we in this position? Why is definitional agreement in politics so difficult to secure? Is it simply bad behaviour – a refusal in the universities and among political thinkers generally to recognize our responsibility to the world at large? Or does the persistence of these difficulties tell us something deeper and more important about the nature of political thought?

We can trace to Hobbes not only the demand for clarity but also the beginnings of an explanation of why that demand was unlikely to be satisfied. Hobbes was among the first to distinguish clearly between what we would now call the emotive and the descriptive meaning of a term, and to recognize the importance of this distinction for a pathology of political science. Take, for example, the concepts of *monarchy* and *tyranny*. According to the traditional Aristotelian view, these concepts denote quite different forms of political organization, with different natures, different merits and, most importantly, different prognoses. But Hobbes points out that, as these terms are commonly used, their descriptive meaning is exactly the same: they both denote the government of many by one man, usually a king. What differs is the emotive meaning. Tyranny is the name that Monarchy is called by men that like it not. Since men are affected in different ways by the same phenomena, there is bound to be an inbuilt "inconstancy" in the way that emotively loaded language is used. "For one man calleth *Wisdom*, what another calleth *fool*; and one *cruelty*, what another *justice*. And therefore such names can never be true grounds of any ratification."

The diagnosis has remained a popular one. In the middle of this century, when the emotive theory of ethics was much in vogue, a lot of attention was paid to what happens when the emotive and the descriptive meaning of a concept begin to come apart. In 1938, the American philosopher Charles Stevenson introduced the idea of a *persuasive definition* – the process whereby a familiar word is given a new descriptive meaning while its old emotive meaning remains substantially unchanged. Thus, for instance, someone may try and define "freedom" as "the recognition of social duty", because if only the good emotive vibrations that surround the word "freedom" can be associated psychologically with the concept of duty, we might be able to persuade people to accept more willingly the rigours of communal life. Or, in a similar sort of way, "democracy" may be redefined as "submission to the will of the Party" – again in an endeavour to redirect people's interests and allegiance, by associating the favourable emotive overtones of "democracy" with the not immediately attractive concept of party domination. This pattern of analysis exercised considerable influence in the 1940s and 1950s. It seemed to explain the operation of propaganda and advertising, and it afforded the philosopher a congenial cynical view of what was going on in political debate.

In the late 1950s, however, a new account of the "inconstancy" of political terminology began to emerge. An important paper by W. B. Gallie (*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1956-7) introduced us to the idea of "essentially contested concepts" – the idea that there may be, in ethics and politics, "concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses". In other words, there may be concepts whose essence it is to be disputed, concepts whose meaning has not been correctly understood if it is not realized that he is engaging immediately in a contest as to its meaning. If Gallie's view is correct, then it is a naive mistake to call for agreed definitions of these concepts. We may justly demand that each rival conception of contested concepts should be defined as clearly as possible, so that we know what the

disagreement is. But if the concept is essentially contested, then it is crazy to expect the rival conceptions to converge. If some of the concepts of politics are essentially contested, why not abandon them and replace them with ones that are not? The real importance of Gallie's idea lies in his suggestion that, in most of these cases, an on-going dispute about the "true meaning" of the concept may do more in the long run to develop and enrich the tradition of thought in which the concept originated, and nurture the values and purposes for which it was originally introduced, than any set of sterile Hobbesian definitions would do. The examples that he gave in his original paper were the concepts of *democracy*, *ari*, *science* and the *Christian way of life*. (More recently, his analysis has been extended to disputes about the



A plate from *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, Vol. 2, Weimar, 1787, in the British Library, showing comfortable and functional clothing for children, based on the theories of John Locke.

true meaning of *justice*, *liberty* and *power*. It is certainly plausible to argue that democratic theory, the artistic and scientific traditions of the West, Christian ethics, and many of the other preoccupations of political science, have been advanced rather than retarded, and that our thinking about the concepts in question has become more subtle and sophisticated, as a result of these perennial and apparently intractable disputes.

It has to be said that none of this is uncontroversial. Many theorists reject Gallie's analysis altogether: they say that the proponents of essential contestability are committed to a hopeless conceptual relativism. Others make great use of Gallie's phrase but reject his account of the importance of essential contestability, using the notion simply as a cover for their own scepticism about objective standards and ideals in politics. Some prefer to stick with Stevenson's more openly cynical account of what is going on. And many persevere in the Hobbesian faith that, despite everything, a set of exact and agreed definitions in politics ought to be possible.

Controversial or not, there is no denying the importance of these developments. My first and most fundamental criticism of Roger Scruton's *Dictionary of Political Thought* is that it contrives somehow to avoid any reference to them. There is a sketchy and inadequate entry in the dictionary for *persuasive definition* – a few lines about "attaching the value of one thing to the reality of another", but no indication that Stevenson's idea was connected with a theory of emotive meaning, and no awareness of the significance of his idea for the enterprise of constructing a dictionary in this area. As for the more recent developments, Scruton does not list or define *essentially contested concept* or *conception*, and he makes no allusion to Gallie's contribution or its

subsequent discussion in political theory. This cannot be because Scruton is unacquainted with essential contestability: the phrase is introduced once, out of the blue, and without further explanation in his entry for *philosophy*. But elsewhere, in the entries for *democracy*, *freedom*, *power* and *justice*, for example, Gallie's idea is conspicuous by its absence.

This is certainly very odd. I would have thought that any account of rival and disputed definitions in a dictionary of this sort would cry out for some reference to current theories about the cause and nature of conceptual disagreement. It is not as if we have one batch of theorists offering their alternative definitions and another batch (whom Scruton can afford to ignore) offering theories about what the first lot are doing. The same theorists are doing both jobs. Political theory is now (and if Hobbes is typical it has always been) an extremely self-conscious activity. One would certainly expect a dictionary to be at least as self-conscious about the process of definition as the users of the words it is defining.

I do not want to suggest that Scruton has simply gone ahead and presented, under cover of a dictionary, his own favoured conceptions of the controversial concepts in question, or that he has been unfair to any of the disputants. On the whole, he has set out the rival positions in a clear and even-handed way. My worry is that the casual reader may come away with an impression that these disagreements simply exist. It will be a mystery to him why they go on year after year, and why the antagonists have not agreed centuries ago to disengage on the basis of a redefinition of terms.

I suspect also that in one or two places Scruton's failure to address these issues has affected his presentation of the first-order disputes. Reading the entry for *power*, for example, one does not get a sense of any of the major controversies that have surrounded the concept in the past twenty years. How closely is power to be associated with overt conflict? What is the relation between power and violence? Is power a function of individuals or of social structures, which in some sense constitute individuals? What is the relation between rival conceptions of power and rival methodologies in political science? The discussion of these issues is inextricably bound up with essential contestability and conceptual relativism. It may be unfair to Scruton, but I have a hunch that his failure to address the one set of issues has led him to neglect the other.

Blood has been shed over the meaning of "justice" and "power" but not, I suspect, over the meaning of "Thomas" and "Roger". Proper names provide us with a different sort of entertainment. As one would expect, Scruton's dictionary lists names of thinkers as well as concepts and movements, and it is diverting to thumb through and see who's in and who's out among our contemporaries. Twenty-two living thinkers are listed, of whom only six rate more than a couple of lines: Althusser, Hayek, Nozick, Oakeshott, Popper and Rawls. (The greatest amount of space is devoted to Nozick, but then his ideas are probably more in need of articulation than anyone else's.) Of the other sixteen, four are economists, two are psychologists, one a philosopher (Quine), and the rest "social theorists" of one sort or another. There are bound to be quibbles about a selection like this and their subjectivity can make them boring. Still, for what they're worth, here are my complaints. It is hard to see why Isaiah Berlin, Robert Dahl, H. L. A. Hart, C. B. Macpherson, and Thomas Kuhn have been dropped from the side; they seem at least as important to political thought as, say, Elias Canetti, Czeslaw Milosz and E. P. Thompson. (But Berlin and the others are in good company: somehow Socrates appears to have escaped notice, even in the article on Plato!)

It is a mystery too why there is no sustained account of the thought of Michel Foucault or Hannah Arendt. Neither rates more than four lines for Scruton, yet both have produced work of the first importance and work which is distinguished, in each case, by its individuality and by the fact that it does not fit easily into any of the other schools and traditions which Scruton discusses.

On the great dead thinkers, Scruton's articles are helpful though predictable. The occasional error is predictable too. "The withering away of the state" is not Marx's phrase but Engels's; Marx wrote always of the abolition/transcendence (*Aufhebung*) of the state, which is a somewhat different idea, not mentioned at all in the dictionary. Bentham's principle of utility is not "The greatest happiness of the greatest number" (an impressive formula like "The fastest car for the lowest price") but rather "The greatest total happiness of the community". There is a serious omission in the article on Kant of any discussion of the political philosophy, as opposed to his ethics. Kant's account of the distinction between *virtue* and *justice*, and his "hypothetical" social contract idea, are both overlooked. And Rousseau did not say that "Dues democracy is the only form of government that can preserve man's natural liberty". Rousseau maintained that the people as a whole should agree on the fundamental law and the constitution, but that government (in the sense of mundane legislation and administration) could never be democratic, not even in Geneva.

I have concentrated at length on Scruton's account of the more familiar aspects of political thought: the well-trodden controversies and household names. But I suppose that people buy this book, they will do so not because they want to look up *Socrates* or *Hobbes* or *power*, but because they want to know in

instance, what *counterfactualism*, *ultramontanism*, *narodnik* or *democracy* mean. It is the jargon of political thought, the technical terms, the portmanteau words, the acronyms, and the names of the sects, the schools and the factions which occupy most of this dictionary and in which its greatest value consists.

One of the most useful terms that Scruton defines is "marxizing". To marxize is to scatter allusions to Marx thought in one's speeches and writings, usually to impress others with one's leftist credentials. ("But seriously, comrades, all marxizing aside... etc.") In a rare flash of self-consciousness, Scruton notes that marxizing is an occupational hazard of a dictionary compiler. On my count, he finds it necessary to marxize to the extent of 153 entries (out of a possible 1200) dealing with Marxist or neo-Marxist names or concepts. When you consider it, this is an immense impact for the thought of one man to have had on a discipline – to have generated so many names or concepts. When you consider it, this is an immense impact for the thought of one man to have had on a discipline – to have generated so many names or concepts. When you consider it, this is an immense impact for the thought of one man to have had on a discipline – to have generated so many names or concepts.

Connected with this is the important political thought of the ideas and vocabulary of economics. Scruton defines more than 180 technical economic terms (that's not counting the Marxist ones), and in this respect his dictionary will be as helpful to academic political theorists as to the journalists, librarians, historians, and marxists who will, I think, make up the main audience.

Kathleen Wilkes

ROBERT WOLLEIM and JAMES HOPKINS (Editors)
Philosophical Essays on Freud
314pp. Cambridge University Press.
£21 (paperback, £7.95).
0 521 24076 X

Freud's own neglect of philosophy, as David Sachs reminds us in this volume, was "greatly facilitated by the philosophical incapacity". This has no more discouraged philosophers from speculating what they can from Freud than his equally cavalier disregard for the demands of scientific studies ("I cannot put much value on these confirmations... It can do no harm") has deterred them from trying to assess the empirical vulnerability of his theory.

The present volume tries to derive from Freud's work conclusions relevant both to philosophical psychology and to the problem of the scientific status of his hypotheses. Almost all the contributors are philosophers, and those that might not be described themselves are concerned with questions of theory or method. Apart from this, the collection has little to say, indeed, once or twice Freud is rather the gate-crasher than the host at the philosophical banquet. A final preliminary: the relation of this book to the predecessor, Richard Wollheim's *Philosophers on Freud*, is puzzling. At best seven of the articles are reprinted from the 1974 collection, and it is surely a missed opportunity to overlap so extensively with a deservedly popular volume only eight years in print.

The scientific standing of psychoanalysis is a recurrent theme in many articles. Clark Glymour, B. R. Coie, et al., Patrick Suppes and Hermine Warren all deal explicitly with the problem, but the familiar reason-*versus*-cause debate concerns many, as does the question of metaphor and anthropomorphism in the theory; Ronald de Sousa, although primarily concerned with Freud's notion of normality, emphasizes the need for some to be made to make the theory of instincts more reliable. The conclusion left in the reader's mind is, unsurprisingly, "not proven".

Glymour encouragingly shows how one might set about obtaining evidence for or against a set of psychoanalytic hypotheses, but then discouragingly shows how the description of the Rat Man case fails to support Freud's conclusions. Nonetheless, Glymour's "theory-testing strategy" is one that would interest those who hope to improve upon Freud's inattention to self-confirmatory considerations. The contribution of Coie et al., a rather heavy attack upon assorted critics of Freud, Frank Cioffi in particular, should not have been printed without at least Cioffi's target article. As it is, the tenor of the attack – Cioffi "leans on Freud" (whereas Coie et al. are merely "quote" Cioffi) and its proposed arguments of the methodological imagination. Popper "threw" Freud, Joseph Agassi is guilty of a "crude non-sequitur" – puts the reader's sympathy firmly behind those he assailed.

None of the contributors deals directly with the severe threat of radical underdetermination. This omission is the more noticeable in that Brian Parrell has recently (*The Soundings of Psychoanalysis*) thoroughly developed the question of underdetermination: "Couldn't the whole thing have been differently treated?" Parrell's book appeared too late for explicit discussion in this collection, certainly, but the problem is familiar enough. James Hopkins, in a contribution to his admirably clear introduction, suggests that it is "utterly implausible" to suppose, with Parrell, that non-Freudian theory could explain Freud's data equally well, but that it is doubly unsatisfactory, first, because it seems *unintelligible* to suppose that it is "differently treated" by different theories. Freudian data, he argues, need not be answerable to Freudian data.

Most of the other contributors either assume the truth of Freudian theory, or else content themselves with a minimalist interpretation: retaining, say, the dynamic unconscious but prudently neglecting better theoretical postulates such as introjection, incorporation, Thanatos, the superego, resistance and the like. Of the former group, Suppes and Warren produce an impressive taxonomy of forty-four different defence mechanisms, so characterized that they could be subjected to empirical investigation. It is perhaps ungenerous to comment how reminiscent this seems of the number-juggling in which post-Hobbesian associationist psychologists indulged: now three Principles of Association, then nineteen, here one, there twenty-four. In any case, for anyone convinced of the overall viability of Freudian theory, this is exactly the sort of work that is most essential. It seems at first that B. J. O'Shaughnessy, who claims to look for "certain phenomena in mental life that make plausible such a theory as that of the id", is equally seeking to support the empirical basis of part of Freud's work. However, it quickly becomes apparent that he hands himself anything else he wants from the backing theory (Eros, the ego with all its powers and characteristics, secondary elaboration, the Apollonian dream-work), and against this background it is hardly surprising to discover that one needs the id too. As a sympathetic exegesis, the essay is helpful; but it provides no independent support for the postulation of the id. Wollheim accepts one of the most theoretical strands of Freud's theory, the speculations about introjection, incorporation and projection, and shows how there are extra wrinkles to the mind-body relation if one accepts that mental states represent themselves as bodily states; I was left uncertain about the implications that Wollheim thinks his intricate arguments have for the mind-body question generally, and the uses to which he puts the crucial notion of "self-representation" baffled me completely.

At the other extreme are those whose discussions are practically independent of Freud, and certainly independent of the full-blown theory. Donald Davidson's treatment of motivated irrationality, an important successor to his well-known article on weakness of will, need never have mentioned Freud at all; Stuart Hampshire and David Pears seem to need little more than the assumption of a reasonably active non-conscious (that is, not "the System Us") in all its glory plus a concession that genetic explanation has a role to play – two propositions that many non-Freudians would be willing to grant. Perhaps all three would regard this as an oversimplification of their positions, but I expect that philosophers and psychologists alike, whatever opinion they hold of Freud, will want to concern themselves with Hampshire's characteristically subtle discussion of dispositions and memory, and with Pears's analysis of the nature and distinguishing marks of various forms of conflict, akrasia, self-deception and cognitive dissonance.

Even with a minimalist adoption of Freud's theory, practically all the contributors either assume or discuss the metaphors which characterize this score are the most Herbert Fingarette, who puts them in perspective; W. D. Hart develops a perceptual model of consciousness, leaving it unclear how far the model can be pushed; Irving Thalberg seems to assume that any analogy or exercise in anthropomorphism can fairly be pressed to the (inevitable) point of ultimate incoherence. Although real, the difficulty here is surely much exaggerated by undue literal-mindedness. As Thomas Nagel (*Inner much alla*) suggests, we should by now be reconciled to the idea of theorizing about internal states in mentalistic terms; not just psychoanalysis, but of relatively reputable agencies of cognitive psychology, so regularly "systemic theory", Freud which all non-behaviourist psychologists, not just Freudians, must insist on – we neither can nor should import all the

ordinary language implications of homely psychological terms when we ascribe them to non-human systems or to parts of the agent. Keith Gunderson remarks somewhere that the fact that rolling stones and rolling people share the property of gathering no moss does not make one a borderline case of the other; even if the ego, or the left hemisphere, or a computer, are characterized in "human" terms, it is yet not necessarily appropriate to wonder whether they will catch a chill without warm pyjamas – precisely what implications are indeed common to the ordinary and to the extended ascriptions of mentalistic terms is, as Nagel emphasizes, something we have yet to discover. The result may be very difficult to imagine; in Nagel's terms, it may be impossible to understand "what it is like to be" the System Us or the right hemisphere of the human brain; but that is a consequence we surely have to accept.

Nagel's reservations about the result.

Back to nature

Onora O'Neill

ROGER TRIGG

The Shaping of Man: Philosophical Aspects of Sociobiology
186pp. Blackwell. £12.50 (paperback, £5.95).
0 631 13023 3

This book does not offer any substantive account of "the shaping of man"; but it deals with far more than the "philosophical aspects of sociobiology". Roger Trigg addresses the enormous question of whether there is any common human nature and while he does not demonstrate that there is, he does provide a forceful case for believing that we cannot get very far in human endeavours if there is not.

Trigg first considers various modern writers who have held that there is no common human nature. Some, like Sartre, have seen only the diversity of self-definition of individual men; others, including Collingwood and Gadamer, have seen rather the diversities of culture and tradition. Trigg argues that denying a common human nature calls the very comprehensibility of others into question. If their nature is not ours, then their concepts and understanding will not be ours, and our understanding of their thought, literature and past is impossible; hermeneutics becomes necessary, and at the same time impossible, discipline. In discarding all conception of a common human nature, modern would-be humanists have locked themselves into forms of relativism which undermine the possibility of literary, historical and moral understanding. They avoid this only when, despite the rhetoric, they maintain or reintroduce some conception of common human nature. Fortunately, Trigg argues, Sartre, Collingwood and (at times) Peter Winch do just this.

A second group of modern writers also denies that there is any common human nature, but for scientific rather than humanistic reasons. If reality is seen as socially constructed, or if human beings are taken to be entirely the products of their environments, then everything men are or can be is to be explained in terms of something other than human nature. Trigg argues that such deterministic theories disagree with a concept of human nature at the cost of undercutting all reasons for their own acceptance. Within a global determinist belief itself is determined, rather than held for reasons, and hence the determinism itself cannot be held for reasons. This argument is not new, but is deployed effectively against a number of distinct determinisms. Epistemological difficulties are shown to await those whose denial of human nature undercuts conceptions of truth and reason, as well as those whose denial leads to such shared language and understanding.

capacities of ordinary language and commonsense understanding are interestingly complemented by Adam Morton's discussion of the impact of psychoanalytic theory upon our everyday conception of ourselves. His thesis is suggestive rather than solidly argued; in fact, the only instance given of a Freudian term that has entered the vernacular is "compulsive" (I pass over the regrettable "anal room"). The essay provokes several questions; in particular, just how extensive and significant is the infection from psychoanalytic theory, especially when compared to that from systems-theory; and how much will prove to be no more than the fatuous "psychobabble" whose prevalence Morton also acknowledges?

There is something in this collection for everybody; although, perhaps, no more than a few will find it great deal. Given the alms of the unifying thread, this is scarcely a surprising result.

Basil Blackwell

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Saintly luggage

Linda Taylor

CLARE BOYLAN

Holy Pictures
201pp. Hamish Hamilton. £7.95.
0 241 10926 4

Holy pictures are sexless. Towards the end of this first novel by Clare Boylan, Mary, the Cantwell's youngest daughter, has a collection of them given to her by her schoolfriends, as a condolence for the death (murder? suicide?) of her father. "The saints on these miniatures had been tamed by the artist's hand until they were neither flesh nor spirit, man nor woman." She lines them up in the bottom of an old trunk where, her father, she had discovered, kept his mementoes (now, curiously, removed) of an Indian woman. The act is talismanic; it transforms her memory of an all too fleshy father - a father whose past had literally caught up with him in the sudden materialization of the Indian woman, who, it is revealed, had been married to him. Her recollection of his appearance is influenced by the sanctity of the pictures: "Father's yellow hair lengthened and curved. The red in his cheeks paled to the rosinose of dawn. The glare of his eyes was tinged with awe."

The placing of the pictures in a novel full of repressed sexuality. For this is Dublin in the 1920s; the perspective that of female, Roman Catholic girls about to become women. Mary's fourteen-year-old sister, Nan, is self-consciously aware of the way in which her body is beginning to bulge uncontrollably and she and her friends find their allegiances divided between the sanctity of their convent school and the demanding lasciviousness of the world outside. To remain a child (and thus a potential saint?), Nan bandages her breasts, only to be accused of unnaturalness by her father. Mr Cantwell's view of female sexuality is concerned with another kind of bondage - the corset, which he manufactures and which is becoming increasingly unfashionable. Nan's gesture appears to him like an act of reason, both against her body and against his life's work.

Seen through the girls' eyes, the men in the book are disturbingly animal in their behaviour: youths at a party claw

at the food and shovel it into their mouths. The young priest visiting the school (easily encourages the older girls to appreciate their bodies as God's work, and the rich, apparently gentlemanly, Mr Finnucane has wandering hands and kisses Nan "in a ponderous, munching way, like a cow eating grass". Confronted by Sister Immaculata, who "had a hunger for blood and seemed, herself, to possess none", and by Nelly, the Cantwell's maid, who tells sexy stories (though the children often fail to understand them as such), Nan and Mary have to find a way between spirituality and grossness. Mother is exquisite but remote; father is boorish and ineffectual - it is up to the children to work out the social and sexual facts of life for themselves.

Clare Boylan conveys the subdued nightmare of childhood and adolescence. Fears (of Schweitzer, the Jew; of Mrs Murtaz, the Indian, and so on) are irrational, but they are also a part of normality. Mary, in particular, is often more knowing in her innocence than the adults are with their worn-out experience. She understands, for instance, why Mrs Graham, one of father's adopted daughters and out, hides her meat on top of the wardrobe (out of politeness; she has no teeth), and why the same woman carries a suitcase (thought to contain money) full of holy pictures. Mary knows that people, like animals (Bertie, the cowardly cat; Elizabeth, the infertile hen), need protection. Adult life is harsh and immoral and the girls, while accepting it as such, create their own, oddly insightful, solidarity against it. Boylan's facility for producing unusual similes often communicates some of the harshness: when Nellie angrily cooks kippers for another of father's female unfortunes, they emerge from the oven "dried into a tormented curve like the prisoners of Indian braves stalked out under the boiling sun". The comparison shows less the similarity of appearance between Indian braves and kippers than it does Nellie's vengefulness.

Holy Pictures is a sensitive, precise and evocative novel. It is dissatisfying only in its refusal to be more expansive. Like the bandages round Nan's chest and the straps around Mrs Graham's suitcase, Clare Boylan's pared-down prose tantalizingly emphasises the possibility of a richer, if secret, potential.

In the shadow of Salome

Victoria Rothschild

LINA WERTMÜLLER

The Head of Alvie
255pp. Heinemann. £7.95.
0 434 88580 1

Lina Wermüller's first novel is a neatly constructed picaresque tale of paranoia, Sammy, the neurotic, New York Jewish narrator, conceives at an early stage a lasting obsession with his Italian Jewish "milk" cousin. They meet in the Venice of 1939, described in a breathless list of clichés, undercut with a certain self-consciousness: "If it weren't stupendous, it would be kitsch", observes Sammy of the "pearl of the Adriatic". Sammy, the scruffy, uncouth son of a maddeningly typical couple - typical New York Jewish; typical too, the typical parents: lewd, garish and affectionate - is naturally self-conscious, alienated and inferior. He develops a complex the moment he sees Alvie. Alvie is a cliché of another kind: European, aristocratic, cultured; not only does he play the violin but he plays it well. Their meeting, in the "Palladium" - built Villa Ombreggiata takes place before a painting of Salome, whose story Alvie is obliged to explain to Sammy. That story casts its shadow throughout the novel, which follows Sammy's increasing obsession with Alvie, until he ends up doing a kind of embarrassed seven veils shuffle before his intractably sympathetic, member-assured superior.

The story starts and ends with dashes

across war-ravaged parts of the world: Europe in the 1940s where Alvie persistently saves the life of the grumbling, twenty Sammy; and the Middle East forty years later where he nonchalantly saves his own life from Sammy's persistent attempts at assassination. Sammy, the ineffectually inferior, has resorted to "assassinating" because by this time he is merely the Number One World Best Seller thriller writer, whereas the seraphic Alvie has won the Nobel Prize for a slim volume.

In between these encounters there's a glimpse of the everyday life of not very ordinary, but conscientiously typical people in New York. Sammy's successful world, with his Ferrari, his Gucci shoes and his "wifey's" mink, is soon ravaged by a chance reunion with his childhood saviour, who he thought had been successfully ditched after the repatriation after the war. Alvie is now a key political as well as literary figure, a crucial negotiator for world peace who has made, inherited and relinquished several fortunes. And he has a stunning wife. Sammy tries a bit of gymnastic revenge on her but discovers that she and Alvie have one of those special understandings. Adultery just won't be good enough, even with the help of the Kama Sutra and some Japanese prints. Sam's education must include the lesson that "to have is not to be".

There are some comic scenes as, for the rest of the novel, Sammy tries to become his own ideal villain. Trailing round the world on one of Alvie's peace missions, he fails to perpetrate a series of perfect murders. Unfortu-

On and off the rails

Nicholas Shakespeare

LISA ST. AUBIN DE TERÁN

The Slow Train to Milan
254pp. Jonathan Cape. £7.95.
0 224 02777 3

On the surface, Lisa St. Aubin de Terán's second novel is as autobiographical as her first. In *Keepers of the House*, a young English girl, married to an unusually silent Venezuelan, chronicles his family's decline in the Andes. Like his forefathers, he was "a great rare fish washed ashore, whose lungs had been unable to adapt to the twentieth century". There are few similar images in *The Slow Train to Milan*, in which an even younger narrator tells how she met her exiled husband and spent two years travelling with him through Europe, before sailing for his avocado plantations. It is an altogether tamer novel, without the wars and pestilence, the madness and legends which made *Keepers of the House* such a success.

Lisaveta is a shy, gauche schoolgirl of sixteen. When she returns from shopping one weekend a total stranger blocks the path to her door with the words, "South America". At thirty-five, César resembles a distinctly debauched fifty-year old. He has spent two years in prison for terrorist offences, and has dark rings under his eyes and a passion for pork and Napoleon. All this comes out gradually, for César is a man of few words, none of them English. Three days after installing himself in her flat, he asks Lisaveta to marry him. When she threatens to leave, he is sick. (It was the pork, he says). She complies, with a remarkable lack of curiosity, "simply because he was there". Only at the Lambeth Registry Office does she discover he is a landowner. "My family is of the elite... for hundreds of years we have ruled Venezuela. I am almost the last of the line, they don't shoot people like me."

César has two exiled friends who are equally restless and broody. Otto, "one of the most brilliant men I have ever met", enjoys a turbulent affair in Oxford with a scratching mistress, who "dressed in a certain way when she was belittled on revenge". Like César, Otto, is on the run, but Elias, who "eludes all description" - apart from his similarity to a Mayan sculpture - is

wanted dead rather than alive. "I didn't know exactly what my three friends did", admits Lisaveta, having smuggled a pistol for them to Paris, "but it was pretty sure it was illegal." It certainly was. "We rob banks", César reveals in a moment of garrulity. Lisaveta's detachment is as ingenious and equivocal as her reason for accompanying the three men on a train to Milan. "I was just there for the ride", she explains. "My feelings were volatile, I wanted to travel. I didn't want much else... There were only two certainties in my life, two loves; wearing long dresses and moving on."

On she moves with her proud companions "from Paris to Milan and back, and sometimes to Bologna". It is an aimless journey in the company of men who are alert to undefined threats but inert while waiting for them to materialize. Blunted by a lack of violence, they emerge as South Americans who have not travelled very well, a little fuzzy round the edges. Their journey takes Lisaveta, innocent and uncomplicated, from privation and penury in squalid tenements to the sudden luxury of a Ravenna palazzo. All the time she is mistaken for her husband's daughter. Once, when the only room they can find is in a brothel, the owner exclaims they are the first married couple he has ever had staying. "A real hotel, mamma, a real

hotel", he says clasping his hands. Next day they find frezias in their room.

Because there is no destination - and no real story - such incidents become the dramatic links which carry the narrative forward. They are the unrelated and fragmented as the characters themselves. César appears to have a magical effect on everyone he meets, despite an endemic compulsion to pinch everything in sight, from a silver chalice to the visitor's book at the Vatican Museum. "Everywhere he went, he was treated like a listed building. No one could resist his indifference" - no one, that is, except the reader. Granted that every word has to be probed out of him, he comes across in a jerky, dislocated fashion. At one point, quite out of the blue, he discovers he is addicted to aspirin. At another, that he loathes cyclists and Frenchmen. At the end, when he decides to pull the communication lines on their drifting existence, he is no more enigmatic and no less tiresome than when he first appeared on the doorstep.

Nothing much happens in *The Slow Train to Milan*. For all the vividness and consistency of the writing, it is more a series of brilliant vignettes than a comprehensive novel; a band of multi-coloured worry-heads rather than a rosary.

Bound to please

Savkar Altinel

EMILY PRAGER

A Visit from the Footbinder and other stories
174pp. Chatto and Windus. £7.95 (paperback, £3.50).
0 7011 2675 2

Although described on its dust-jacket as "dispatches from the front line" where "provoked women and provocative men meet", this collection of stories is more like the jottings of a mercenary determined to keep out of the fighting and prosper by serving both sides. A contributor at once to *Ms* and *Penhouse*, Emily Prager writes with a keen awareness that there is more than one market to exploit, and the results of her efforts to be all things to all persons are rich with ambiguity.

In the title story, set in China in the thirteenth century, foot-binding serves as an emblem of female bondage. This is familiar territory, and the message seems reassuringly simple and straightforward. What is less reassuring, however, is the way in which the story unnecessarily dwells on the details of the process, gradually building up to a climax in which a girl binds up to a chair with leather thongs as her toes painfully bent into place by a leering Buddhist nun with a shaven head and a round body like a "carved ivory ball". Despite the jokiness of the tone, there is no disguising the intention of the writing to titillate.

The same also goes for the novella-length "The Lincoln-Pruitt Anti-Rape Device" in which a group of American women fitted with a castrating gadget are sent into the jungles of South-east Asia in search of unsuspecting Vietcong men. Once again the point is clear: no matter how intelligent,

sophisticated and self-assured she may be, a woman will not be completely free as long as she has to live with the fear of sexual assault. Unfortunately, this cannot be underlined without the women baring their breasts, massaging each other with oils, painting dark spots on their bodies, and performing other acts supposedly designed to liberate the enemy. Even worse is the description of the Major in charge of the operation:

For one thing the woman had style. In addition to a well-tailored blue Army tunic and jodhpurs, the Major always wore a highly-polished sea-brown belt, brown pumps with four-inch heels, Italian leather chocolate-brown gloves that buttoned at the wrist. A beige envelope cap sat jauntily on her bouffant chestnut hair, and her backbones was ramrod straight...

The story is ultimately as assiduously pandering to male fantasies as it is supporting the cause of liberation.

The three remaining stories are slight. Although one shows Jess Kosinski confronted by three women wearing eight-inch dildoes who, to everyone else, want to know if he really wrote *The Painted Bird*, and another offers a glimpse of Russell Baker's elevator, they are remarkable only because of their ability to yield the clichés of feminist propaganda to those of soft porn, dressing their heretical tight skirts and "very high heels" and having them tied to beds and flagellated. Interestingly, at one point we meet an emancipated woman called Edna who writes pornography for living, but feels compelled to pay a middle-aged English charity man, Mrs Bainbridge to pretend to be the author of her books. Complicity incongruity bothers Ms Prager much less, and she is happy to play both parts herself.

JOHN HUTTON

Accidental Crimes
252pp. Bodley Head. £7.50.
0 370 34098 5

It's an unfortunate accident that Conrad, lecturer in a college of education, should be on or near the scene not once, but twice, after the raped and mutilated body of a girl has been discovered on the moor. The first time his questioning by the police is routine, but they begin to get enthusiastic the second time round: Conrad's shabby little secrets and evasions begin to emerge; his marriage starts to fall apart, and his job crumbles before him. A clinically neat, cruelly brilliant dissection of a self-important, self-satisfied personality: to whom one can, in the end, refuse a twinge of sympathy.

LAURENCE MEYNELL

Silver Gull
190pp. Macmillan. £6.50.
0 333 34315 8

"All lights turn green for Elworthy" is the motto of provincial journalists and Elworthy. But he rides his luck to the far, gets into a financial jam, and turns to amateur burglary. Miranda, daughter of a retired general, pulls him out of the soup and acquires a million in life.

Silver Gull is an amusing, neat and unpretentious novel - a thoroughly professional piece of work, long on technical skill, but short on imagination since 1924.

T. J. BLIN

FICTION

Cybernetic sentimentality

Colin Greenland

STANISLAW LEM

More Tales of Pirx the Pilot
239pp. Secker and Warburg. £7.95.
0 304 24111 X

ROBERT SILVERBERG

Sanctus on Mercury
175pp. Gollancz. £7.95.
0 575 03217 0

Stanislaw Lem's earlier tales of Pirx and his development from a banking cadet, the class dummy, to an unexpected prowess as a sort of space detective, whose strength is his intuition rather than his intellect. This second volume presents a Pirx who has become mentally and physically confident and capable of swift and accurate responses: in five stories he battles only once, and finds himself up before the Cosmic Tribunal for it. The examination, his hesitation proves to be profoundly moral and efficient, as he is acquitted. It seems that Pirx has chosen perfection of work rather than life. In the process he has become almost characterless, pure function, with no inner life at all. Lem's attempt to give him a social persona consists of making him express himself in clichés which sound, in translation at least, as stilted as anyone trying to be casual. It is significant that his key success during training was saying in the sensory deprivation tank "I am not anyone else. Now even Pirx dreams turn out to be contributions to his investigations."

It is entirely appropriate that one of his missions is to work with a team of robots indistinguishable, like Isaac Asimov's "postronic robots", from humans, until crisis forces them to break cover and reveal their technical superiority. Unlike Asimov, however, Lem is concerned with the existential dimensions of the encounter. Pirx, a man who has been mechanized, is engaged to judge "the imperfect examination of machines into men". His philosophical discussions concern between Pirx and a robot - or is it actually one of the control group pretending to be a robot? Lem signals his awareness of the ironies with a witty little joke or two. A company employee tells Pirx, "I'm just a tiny cog

in the Nortronics machine." A receptionist, her high heels "like tiny metal stilts", is described as "a platinum blonde".

Testing robots and humans at work together, Pirx wonders whether he ought to "penalize the robots for not being human", but can he do anything else? In another story, "Ananke", Pirx sits on the committee of inquiry into a spaceship crash caused by a computer which could not cope with a landing because it was over-programmed. Glutted with in-coming information, it could not make a decision and tried to run away from the planet. This is a machine which pays the penalty for being too human. Lem is careful to justify this analogy in cybernetic terms, but in two other stories, "The Accident" and "The Hunt", he has Pirx chase two robots which have erred for less specific reasons, though with very specific results: one falls off a mountain and is not instructed to climb, and the other starts carving up a lunar colony with its mining laser. Here it becomes apparent that Lem is complementing his practice of dehumanizing people by romanticizing robots whose self-awareness easily generates a literary pathos. Alas, the inhuman condition. (This pathos is also traditional, stretching from Mary Shelley's glum golem through Asimov's little lost robots, Philip K. Dick's dreaming androids, and John Sladek's hapless learning machine, Roderick, all the way down to Douglas Adams and Marvin the metal melancholic.)

Cybernetic sentimentality apart, the galaxy where Pirx lives and works is a thoroughly unromantic, unsensational place. "People on Earth can't imagine what a pain the stars are - what a drag it is to cruise the cosmos, even for a year at full thrust, with never a change of scenery!" The Moon is spartan and boring, Mars is grey and gritty, there is no alien life anywhere and a pilot's toughest task is steering through the "egg", the inflexible law and bureaucracy of international space administration: that surrounds him. (It is always a him: there are few women in Lem's futures). What's more, by the time he's experienced enough to know how to do it, he's too old to fly, and against that decision there is no appeal. The universal harshness of the conditions give a further reason for Pirx's iron soul.

For relaxation, Pirx reads "sci-fi, the

corny, easy-to-read stuff, where everything, the cosmos included, is so tame". Robert Silverberg's new collection *Sanctus on Mercury* would fit Pirx's bookshelf well enough. It is a new collection only in the sense that these particular thirteen stories have not appeared together in one volume before. One is from 1974 and one from 1969; all the others were first published before 1959. The date is significant in Silverberg's inhumanly prolific career: 1958 marked the end of his first period, that of what he himself calls "high-volume hackmanship". This was the Silverberg who regularly supplied all the available pulp magazines with material to order: "If an editor needed a 7,500-word story of alien conquest in three days to balance an issue about to go to press, he need only phone me and I would produce it." The stories in *Sanctus on Mercury* are perhaps some of the less negligible relics of that period; they are not badly written as such. But they are uniformly bland, tossed off with the facility of an intelligent writer earning an easy dollar by spinning out a single idea (or not even as much) to a specified length. The most vivid are "The Silent Colony", which features intelligent snowflakes, and "Why?", in which a space explorer, veteran of a hundred and sixty-four planets, suddenly wonders why he bothers. The most offensive, on the other hand, is "Precedent", a gleeful story of a vicious and violent confidence trick played on an alien race by the Commander of a Terran Cultural and Military Mission. It even carries a moral of manic xenophobia: "If aliens demand equality with Earthmen, give 'em all the equality they can stand. Give it to 'em till it hurts!"

In his middle period Silverberg surprised his audience and altogether redeemed his reputation by writing a large number of original and imaginatively challenging novels and stories, including *The Man in the Maze* and *Dying Inside*. His most recent works, mellifluous fairytales published amid gales of hyperbole and demonstrating a thorough contempt for their readership, have already done much to obscure what he achieved in the seventies. By reissuing his journeyman efforts as if they were "vintage stories" Gollancz are abetting Silverberg's decline, and doing a disservice to the new readers who will be most likely to pick up this volume.

An alpha's omega

Roz Kaveney

FRANK HERBERT

The White Plague
445pp. Gollancz. £8.95.
0 575 03240 5

In his novels Frank Herbert presents habitually glowing visions of social and biological evolution. Many people, however, would rather die than experience the horrors which he thinks necessary for such human development. Much American science fiction is deeply authoritarian in its general outlook and prescriptions, but oddly mealy-mouthed about details; Herbert, by contrast, enthusiastically describes the bloody strategies by which the alpha male preserves and, where possible, improves his genes. In *The White Plague* he applies his usual drastic remedies to the present, just in case his readers had kidded themselves that his message only applies to the inhabitants of his imaginary distant futures.

The Provisional IRA blow up the family of an American biologist called O'Neill who goes mad and cooks up a plague fatal to human females in his bathtub. He intends it as a punishment for Eire, Great Britain and Libya but it spreads and, demented, he wanders an Ireland reverted to barbarism. Then scientists not only find the cure, but also discover the secret of longevity. Things will never be the same - women will have to concentrate on breeding, polyandry will become the norm and scientists will be forced to participate in the ruling elite if they want to avoid enslavement and universal

catastrophe. All the things of which Herbert disapproves - democracy, feminism - disappear of necessity; by the end of the book the enlightened are quietly regarding O'Neill as a benefactor.

As narrative technique Herbert adopts, ill-advisedly, a kaleidoscopic switching of viewpoints; this bid for a broad canvas shows up the silliness of some of this thought in a way concentration on a few characters might not have. The emotional impact of the death of half the human race is diminished somewhat by the fact we never get to know any of them except for an Irish ninny. The only women who survive are those preserved by men in laboratories or seraglios.

The multiplicity of viewpoints means that we never really get a chance to know any of Herbert's characters as much more than names; even the priest, terrorist and silent boy who accompany O'Neill in his celtic twilight wanderings stay largely symbols. Herbert tries hard to make O'Neill comprehensible but never solves the paradox implicit in the myth of the Mad Scientist - if he is that mad, how can he be so competent? If he causes so much pain how can we care for his tragedy? He comes closest to resolving these problems in a macabre kangaroo court trial scene, but significantly can only end it by having a mob come through the door with a pitchfork. Just as the *Dune* books were at their best, and won their large audience, when the young prophet was scuttering away from his enemies through the sand, *The White Plague* is only really satisfactory when O'Neill is wandering silently through the devastation of Ireland.

An old Ham

Lewis Jones

STEPHEN MINOT

Surviving the Flood
304pp. Gollancz. £8.95.
0 575 03237 5

In Stephen Minot's *Surviving the Flood* Ham is now 900 years old and "the only surviving witness" of the Flood. In what he calls the "Official Report" he is said to have been Noah's second son, to have taken with him a wife into the ark and to have committed some sort of indecency on his father when the old man was drunk, for which his offspring were to be the servants of servants. He says, however, that he was the third son and an antediluvian bachelor, that what the indecency was Noah's and that what sounds like a curse was in fact a kind of blessing. The Official Report is a conspiracy, "a terrible cover-up". Minot has followed the example of novelists like John Galsworthy and Robert Nye, in a self-consciously low style and with considerable gusto and ingenuity he has turned his chosen myth on its head.

Ham remembers himself to have been a sensitive and idealistic youth, "gratified" by a "cruel" and "arbitrary" state of affairs. At the end of the first chapter, when the ark is beginning to float, he watches his father chop off the hands and arms of their neighbours as they try to scramble on board; when he looks out he is confronted by "a sea of reproachful corpses". He wonders why Jahweh has chosen his family: Noah, for all his admirable energy, is a tyrant and hypocrite; Shem, the eldest son, is an unimaginative lout; and Japheth is an indolent drunkard. The only people with whom Ham has anything in common are those whom the Official Report ignores: Methuselah, the family patriarch, who occupies the uppermost deck, and the servants down below. Methuselah is a joky, lecherous figure and is nearing the end of his life. On his death-bed he scandalizes the family by explaining that they are descended from Cain, rather than from Seth, and by naming Ham as his heir, with his last words he exhorts his "great-grandchildren" to overcome his disreputable ancestry by pursuing "warm values".

As it happens, Ham has already

found such values in the person of a servant called Sapphira; but Cain casts a long shadow. Sapphira is the property of Shem, and the two brothers fight over her bitterly. Their quarrel is ended, though, when the ark begins to sink. The servants saw the day and are rewarded with callous ingratitude. They rebel, and Ham finds himself supporting their cause but deploring their methods. This crisis is in its turn resolved by the subsidence of the waters and the discovery of bedraggled survivors outside, whom he and the ark crew rescue. Noah sets about colonizing. Ham marries Sapphira and, after a singularly traumatic wedding-night, they go off to found Sodom, Gomorah and Babylon.

Minot's characters are too obviously programmed and their plausibility is further impaired by their crudely anachronistic opinions. The servant's revolt presents a challenge to Ham's "rosy liberalism"; disgusted by the custom of sacrifice he wonders "if perhaps it were the creatures here below who were taking pleasure in the slaughtering for if we did not, wouldn't we have declared our Maker a vegetarian?" The plot, too, is over-determined. *Surviving the Flood* is nevertheless an effective entertainment; and it is beautifully illustrated with woodcuts and engravings of the ark and its passengers.

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Emerging slowly

Alan Sked

ANDREW C. JANOS

The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary 1825-1945
370pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press. £19.30 (paperback, £8.90). 0 691 07633 2

This is not a history book but a piece of sociology based on the assumption that "during the period under consideration" Hungary was not a "western" but a "backward country" located on the periphery of the world system and labouring under the same material and psychological handicaps as today's "emerging nations" in the so-called Third World. Andrew C. Janos hopes that it will enable him "to look for analogies and more ambitiously to develop a generalized concept of peripheral politics". This reviewer would advise him to abandon the attempt.

Janos is without doubt a scholar of great erudition but his study, which concludes that late industrialization is the determining force in Hungarian history - is undermined by all sorts of objections. For a start it seems suspiciously circular in so far as it proves merely what it states; second, it is based on a number of fundamental misconceptions about European and world history; third, it wildly overstates its case at a number of key points; fourth, it obscures the real determining forces in Hungarian history during this period - a parliamentary tradition, liberal ideals, the existence of the nationalities, the constitutional links with Austria, the proximity of Russia and Germany while, finally, it is in many ways unfair. That is to say, Janos consistently accuses the Hungarians of being backward on account of policies which are patently "progressive". But let us

examine some of these objections in more detail.

Regarding Janos's views on European and world history, it would seem that he generalizes to a point which is almost meaningless. What for example is "the western historical experience"? For that matter what is the "West"? What is the "core" and what is the "periphery"? What is the "Third World"? Does it - the whole of it - share a common "experience" too? Does Hungary really have more in common historically with Ethiopia than Great Britain? Janos's book raises all these questions. But let us return to his concept of a "western historical experience". In the period covered by the book this was hardly the same for most European countries. Germany and Italy had to undergo wars of unification; France had intermittent revolutions, so that while Britain consolidated her parliamentary system of government the French experienced revolutionary dictatorships, moderate republicanism, constitutional monarchy, imperial despotism, republican democracy and Vichy. Despite this variety, the régimes which emerged in Germany, with the brief exception of Weimar, were of a different character still. Thus we can dispense, I think, with the notion of a common "western political experience".

Janos might object, however, that he has really been referring to the economic history of the "core" of the West. For at least two points in his book (p169 and p243) he appears to narrow his definition of the West quite considerably. Here apparently it includes neither Germany nor Italy nor even most of France. But even these two references contradict each other for p169 includes West Germany while p243 excludes it. Similarly p169 excludes most of France while p243 includes it all. Yet it is rather important to know whether "the West" includes the whole of France and Germany or not. Perhaps Janos is surreptitiously attempting to answer another

objection to his thesis, namely that even within states regional variations render meaningless any attempts to lump them into universal categories of backward and developed nations. For example, can the United Kingdom be taken to include Ireland for Janos's purposes? Can Inverness be said to have been "developed" in 1914 and Budapest and Berlin "underdeveloped"? Clearly there is a difficulty here. However, Janos's way of resolving it - by limiting his "core" to England, West Germany, Northern France and the Low Countries - is merely tautological. It is hardly an intellectual revelation to be told that industrialized areas are different from unindustrialized areas because the latter have no industry.

Regarding Hungary itself, Janos drives his argument too hard. To say that there was a "progressive narrowing of political régimes" is misleading. The Dualist system was much more liberal than the Metternich or Bach régimes while the Horthy régime between the wars was more liberal than the Dualist one. In fact it is nonsensical to try to paint the political history of Hungary in the colours of some Latin American banana republic or Third World dictatorship. All Janos's evidence suggests that Hungary's rulers were committed to a parliamentary system under the rule of law and that for most of the time the franchise in Hungary was no more restricted than in the rest of Europe. Thus under Dualism, we are told the courts were free, the press was free and (outside areas inhabited by the "nationalities" whose loyalty to the state was in doubt - cf Ireland in British history) elections were free. Prime ministers who did not consult their back-benchers lost power; the High Court freed one deputy who tried to shoot another who had accused a second premier of fraud. The same court regularly overturned disputed election results in government constituencies.

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Meanwhile, newspapers flourished everywhere, including socialist ones which used terms such as "pigs" and "criminals" of ministers who were passing laws on social security and workers rights as progressive as any in Europe. These same ministers were also pursuing a policy of industrialization which was to give Hungary from the 1880s a growth-rate on average of over 6 per cent per annum. Most of these policies and freedoms, it should be added, were retained between the wars. Right up to March 1944, Janos acknowledges, Hungary enjoyed an effective opposition and a free press - and, of course, did much more to save its Jewish population than the more "advanced" French and Germans. Thus it is difficult to accept Hungary's "backwardness".

Janos, finally, vitally underestimates the true motive forces in Hungarian history. Adherence to a parliamentary tradition frustrated both Metternich and Franz Joseph, just as it did the more authoritarian tendencies of the Tiszas, Gömbös and Imrédy. Domination by foreign powers - particularly Austria - shaped not

merely Hungarian politics before 1944 and after 1967 but also economic and defence policies. Foreign intervention by Romania in 1919, by Germany in 1944 and by Russia in 1948 and 1967. But it is the role of the nationalities most of all which cannot be underestimated. For it was the nationality problem which divided the "nation" in 1848-49. It was the nationality problem which was at the root of the Tisza system - all the government's "safe" seats were in Slovak and Romanian counties; it was the nationality problem once again which encouraged the Magyar to protect the Jews (assimilated but sustained the Magyar majority); while last but not least it was the nationality problem which led to the First World War and the end of Greater Hungary. I do not doubt that economic backwardness also had a part to play in shaping Hungarian history, but to argue - as Janos does - that it alone also determined that history does not seem to be supported by the facts. Historical backwardness by itself cannot explain the history of Hungary, far less that of the whole Third World.

Corruption and creation

Virgil Nemoianu

ALEXANDRE CIORANESCU

Ion Barbu

155pp. Boston: Twayne.

In the last few years before his death, Ion Barbu was a daunting figure: a large, frame bent over a gauntled walking stick, a drooping white mustache and flowing mane behind an Olympian brow, a huge turn-of-the-century bow-tie, a sad, open gaze. By this time, he had become a living legend. In the Stalinist 1950s in Romania he had refused to publish anything except for a fragmentary, tortured and icy translation of *Richard III*, but had instead withdrawn into his other career as a mathematician. Barbu had obtained his doctorate in mathematics in 1924 with a dissertation on "The Canonical Representation of the Addition of Hyperelliptic Functions", having studied at Göttingen, Tübingen and Bucharest, and in 1941 he became a full professor of algebra at the University of Bucharest. He lectured at many European universities and his papers and textbooks in various branches of mathematics won him what I assume as a non-mathematician, was a well deserved reputation. His scientific work always appeared, however, under the name of Dan Barbilan. Barbu was his poetic name, which earned him a quite separate renown.

This second personality was also that of a robust and tireless womanizer (a "peuple de bien", his friends called him) and of a lusty Bohemian and haughty iconoclast. The sum total of his published poetry amounts to some 3,000 lines, virtually all of which were written in the 1920s. His masters were Moreas, Valéry and Mallarmé, as well as Poe and Coleridge, and he astonished his readers with a blend of dense hermeticism and formal perfection. His poems are among the most difficult ever written in Romanian. Yet his was not the absurdly free association technique practised by the Surrealists and Dadaists. Barbu sought to reach down to a depth where mystical and mathematical symbols could cooperate and invoke the seething Dionysian core of Being through its contrary: cold, polyhedral forms. The several cycles of his lyrical verse which explore this area, notably "The Dogmatic Egg", are generally considered as the foundation on which his poetic reputation must rest.

The great merit of Alexandre Cioranescu's monograph is that it emphasizes equally the other sides of Barbu's work. Cioranescu, a specialist in Comparative Literature and Romance Philology (he taught for many years at the University of Laguna in the Canaries) and, accordingly, his outlook is broad. He is aware that Barbu's earliest poetry is transitional and tentative, lightly initiating

Parnassian and Symbolist models. It is particularly strong in showing the Nietzschean promises of mind of Barbu's vision, particularly in terms of the tension between the will to form and anarchic creativity.

But useful as these indications may be, the chief merits of Cioranescu's study lie elsewhere. He explains how although Barbu's poems may seem abstract and hermetic, they do have historical underpinning, albeit a somewhat fantastical one. One of his recurring motifs is the town of Iasi, the colourful and corrupt Balkan settlement which, according to Barbu, arose on the ruins of ancient Tyrry. Iasi is endearingly decadent, a place both corrupt and creative where a motley crew of saintly juglars, prostitutes and chimeric merchants are heirs to a world beneath which the perfect geometry of an ideal civilization can still be vaguely perceived or remembered. The motif of Iasi is "halfway between Evil and Good", an archaeological low stratum full of the refuse of former civilizations, as picturesque as a 13 malodorous.

Cioranescu also dwells on another cycle of lyric poems in which small and other gasteropods abound. Barbu described these in a famous line as "super-sexual and super-male". Their presence suggests a writhing, teeming world from which power and reason are absent and from which must be closer to absolute lyricism and "uncreated existence". In these and others of his poems Barbu abandons regular metres in favour of free verse.

Barbu was more or less explicit about his neo-Platonic aims. He suggests in his occasional essays as well as in some of the poems themselves that mathematics, together with the "secondary game" (this is the name of one of his finest series of poems), and that though it may be secondary to comparison with an immediate palpable reality, this "game" can give us a vision of an unshuffled truth.

His long and stilled silence as a poet during the last thirty years of his life (he died in 1961) has something symbolic about it, historically speaking. He offered a sophisticated, intellectually demanding version of some of the themes in Romanian culture: a search for an aesthetic idealism, a yearning for Paradise, a resentment against history, a ferocious innocence. But Barbu was too subtle a mind not to realize that culture predicated upon "game" sentiments as these were bound to founder sadly in injustice and to lose touch with reality; and late 1930s happened after all. Late 1930s in Romania. As a literary influence, the Romanian writers have initiated a search for a more Platonic idealism, a yearning for Paradise, a resentment against history, a ferocious innocence. But Barbu was too subtle a mind not to realize that culture predicated upon "game" sentiments as these were bound to founder sadly in injustice and to lose touch with reality; and late 1930s happened after all. 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